BOOKS

Their Place in a Democracy

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BY

R. L. DUFFUS

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R. L. DUFFUS

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INTRODUCTION

THIS small contribution to the year's multitudinous output of new volumes is the result of a study undertaken for the Carnegie Corporation into "the publication and distribution of serious, non-technical books." This definition obviously excluded textbooks and specialized works in the arts and sciences. Just as obviously it excluded any other books which were not "serious." I have touched in the course of my discussion upon the difficulty of determining precisely what constitutes seriousness in books. It has seemed to me that some fiction is serious and that some non-fiction is also non-serious. Consequently, it appeared best to make a survey of publishing, bookselling, and library work with as careful a consideration as possible of the manner in which the problems of publication and distribution of books in general bore upon the problem of producing and distributing serious books. Such a survey could not be exhaustive. I can only hope that I have co-ordinated certain factors in the handling of books in such a way as to bring out the important principles.

My survey did not begin with a preconceived thesis, though it was hoped that it might result in suggestions as to ways and means of extending the circulation of serious books. I did, however, reach the conclusion that the relative unimportance of books in American life was due less to the apathy of the public than to the failure of those who distribute books to devise systems for reaching large numbers of people. Book publishing has fallen far behind the pace set by newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, and radio broadcasting. There are indications that this fact has been

recognized by publishers and distributors of books, and that a very considerable broadening of what I have called, for the sake of convenience, the book market is now under way. But this means the market for any kind of book, not necessarily for serious books.

Here, I am well aware, I have arrived at a controversial point. If, it will be argued, the millions who now habitually go to motion-picture shows could be induced to put in an equivalent amount of time reading books, the books they would read could not rise above the present low cultural level of the movies. The public will always be the same public, whether it gets its trash from the screen, the comic strip, or the wood-pulp magazine. It will always be ignorant and insensitive. It will always be subject to exploitation by any one shrewd enough to capitalize its mass prejudices and mob emotions. The kind of book which millions will read cannot have literary or intellectual value.

These contentions are too important to ignore. They seem to me to raise two questions. The first of these is whether the large-scale popularization of books would necessitate a standardization of their contents. The second is whether the level of popular taste, in America, in the machine age, is fixed by some kind of immutable law or whether it can be raised. The first query is easily answered. The conditions of book production are and always will be utterly different from those of motion-picture production. They are and will be, so long as advertising plays its present important rôle and so long as advertisers seek for mass circulations, utterly different from the conditions of newspaper and magazine production. Standardization in the physical manufacture and distribution of books there may well be — indeed, there must be if books are to be placed under the noses of millions of potential readers.

But standardization of contents, as I have tried to demonstrate, is not inevitable. An individual motion picture is an enterprise which cannot be made to pay for itself without a circulation of hundreds of thousands and even millions, counting as circulation the total number of those who pay to see it. An individual book can be made reasonably profitable at the present time by a circulation of, let us say, ten thousand. If the book market were as large as the motion-picture market, such a book might have a circulation of many times ten thousand and still address itself to the tastes and preferences of only a small fraction of the book-reading public. In other words, the least common denominator of a successful book under any conceivable conditions would always be immensely larger than that of a successful motion picture. Variation and experimentation in a large book market would be safer and more profitable to the publisher than they are in the present limited book market. There could be more "serious" books to choose from than there are now.

There could be, that is, if, after passing beyond the few hundred thousand persons, at most, who now constitute the market for "serious" books, we did not arrive at a million-minded stratum of humanity which does not want or understand, and never can be made to want or understand, such books. It may be that only a small minority are capable of that exhilarating and strenuous pursuit of truth and beauty which great literature demands. It may be that even those who strive for "culture" for snobbish and unworthy reasons are not much more numerous, and that underneath these layers of the truly cultured and their pathetic imitators lies a barbaric mass which can never be deeply penetrated by civilization. If these things are true, the cultural missionary, whether in literature, in the arts, or in the sciences, might as well pack his trunk and sail for home. I do not think they are true.

Undoubtedly there will always be variations in the ability to appreciate, just as there are variations in the ability to create. Great readers will not be as scarce as great writers, but they will be a chosen company. There are ideas so subtle that the democratic mass is shut off from them. But I do not believe these ideas are as numerous as is sometimes assumed. I believe that the failure of the democratic majority to accept intellectual and æsthetic ideals is due rather to a lack of will to do so than to a lack of ability. And I believe that the lack of will is due to false and imperfect systems of education and to other conditions in the environment which can be altered. The culturability of mankind — if I may invent a word — ought not to be judged by its response to stimuli which until yesterday were enjoyed almost wholly by a leisure class. Only an abysmal ignorance of human nature can account for such assumptions. The arrogance of the "cultured," increasing in recent years with the growing criticism of democracy, has many sins to answer for. It has tended to defeat its own purported objectives. It has helped perpetuate barbarism by assuming that barbarism is inevitable. It has itself been barbarically intolerant and uninquisitive.

I do not labor under the delusion that I have established this thesis beyond cavil in the pages that follow. I have not attempted anything so ambitious. I have merely essayed to give a matter-of-fact picture of what is actually going on, presenting for this purpose as many details, dry or otherwise, as seemed necessary. As I reach the end of my study, I do not doubt that the wider circulation of books, good, bad, and indifferent, will be, when debits and credits are balanced, a civilizing influence. Nor do I doubt that, when books of all kinds are placed within the reach of every one, good books will more than hold their own with the bad and indifferent. All of which amounts, not to an ingenuous faith in "crowds" or "mobs," but to

a conviction that the capacities of the ordinary human being have yet to be explored and developed. Those who find this conviction irritating will not, I fear, see much point to this unpretentious volume or to the movement in which it is hoped it will play its small part.

I should add, as a matter-of-fact footnote to this introduction, that conditions in the field I have tried to describe have been changing rapidly even as I wrote. Chapter Eight was recast and other passages interpolated after the manuscript was in complete form in order to take cognizance of the latest adventure in "cut-rate" publishing. Certain other details that are accurate to-day may have altered between final proof-reading and printing. But I have painted the scene as I saw it as faithfully as I could and have indicated wherever possible what seemed to be the lines of change.

BOOKS

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CHAPTER I

AMERICA HAS A BOOK

It may be said of America, as of the young lady in the story, that she already has a book. The book trade looms very large indeed, so long as we can keep from comparing it with trades that loom larger. In 1929 the reading public was confronted with the bewildering task of selecting from among 8342 new titles and 1845 new editions. There are approximately two hundred book publishers who issue five or more titles a year. Among them these publishers produce, of all varieties and prices, the respectable total of about 200,000,000 copies every twelve months. If these books were retailed at one dollar each, which is below the average price, the total national expenditure for books would be, as is not hard to calculate, $200,000,000. But the figures dwindle when they are applied to population. They indicate that the American public buys approximately two books per capita each year, and that it pays for books certainly not more than one half of one per cent of its annual income.

But there are the public libraries. Here, too, the bulk statistics are imposing enough. The American Library Association, looking into this subject several years ago, found that there were in the United States and Canada 6524 public libraries, that these libraries possessed 68,653,275 volumes, that they issued 237,888,282 volumes each

year, and that they spent annually $37,094,303. Unfortunately this means that the libraries had only six tenths of a book per capita of population, that they circulated only two books a year for each man, woman, and child, and that for this service they extracted only 32 cents a year per capita from public and private bank accounts. The Association found that 44 per cent of the total population and 83 per cent of the rural population had no public-library service. It found that there were 1135 counties out of 3065 in the United States which had no public libraries within their boundaries. It found 4 cities of between 25,000 and 100,000 population, 55 cities of from 10,000 to 25,000, and 577 villages and small cities of 2500 to 10,000 which had no public libraries. Since these statistics were collected, library service has grown considerably. But it has not grown in any revolutionary manner. There has been no modern Revival of Learning.

We may still say, without maligning our countrymen, that the average American buys two books and borrows two books from the library each year. To this, in order to get his total of book-reading, we must add the books he borrows from the rental libraries and perhaps, too, those he borrows from his neighbors — and sometimes forgets to return. These figures we will have to guess at. A bookseller of long experience and great sagacity estimates that about eight per cent of all general books sold in America are at present disposed of to rental libraries. By general books he means all except textbooks and technical books. Let us be generous rather than accurate and say that this estimate of rented books comes to about 10,000,000 copies. Let us now assume that each rented book circulates twenty times — more generosity on our part. This would give a total of about 200,000,000 readings, or less than two books per capita per annum. Let us assume, further, that each American borrows a book a year from a

friend or relative. We now have the following results: two books a year bought outright, two books a year borrowed from the library, two books a year rented from rental libraries, one book a year borrowed from a friend — or a possible total of seven books a year read by the average American.

This total may be affected in several ways — by the fact that part of the population is in infancy or early childhood and therefore too young to read; by the fact that books bought may be read by several members of the family; by the fact that our figures include school library books which are not a part of the nation's spontaneous reading. These considerations, roughly speaking, cancel each other. The very best we can say is that the voluntary book-reading of the American public — and this includes everything that can legally be called a book, good or bad or indifferent — cannot possibly amount to more than one volume per capita every two months. If we were to make a distribution curve — which I have no intention of suggesting — it would probably show that a relatively small percentage of Americans read much more than seven books a year, that a relatively large percentage read much less, and that many millions, after their school days are over, read none at all. This statistical excursion need not be taken too solemnly. But, all errors of amateur mathematics aside, it is plain that we are not a book-reading nation.

Now, it is quite true that it is unfair to discuss America's reading without taking account of the development of newspapers and magazines in this country. The higher type of magazines, which have not entered into our preceding calculations, certainly have more to do with raising the level of our thinking and feeling than have perhaps fifty per cent of all the books published. If we were analyzing the total reading of the American people, we would have to recognize that magazines and newspapers

play a dominant part in it, and we would have to take into account the cultural implications of such varied publications as "The Atlantic Monthly," "Harper's Magazine," "Liberty," "The Saturday Evening Post," "Collier's," and "True Stories." Nor could we neglect the newspapers, which in 1929, in the United States and Canada, had an estimated daily circulation of 44,110,094 copies. Newspapers and magazines are heavy lines in our cultural pattern, whereas books as yet are but faint traceries. But I believe it is safe to assume that if a nation's literary culture rises above a certain level that fact will reveal itself in books.

Setting magazines and newspapers aside, therefore, I invite contemplation of the cultural condition of the greatest and richest republic of all history, whose inhabitants do not willingly read more than seven books a year apiece, and who spend for general books a grand total of not more than $150,000,000 a year. Let us measure the importance of books in our national life by comparing this figure with expenditures for other luxuries. Let me quote from an unimpeachable source, Farmers' Bulletin No. 1559, issued from the Government Printing Office at Washington: "The national bill for soft drinks is eleven times as large as the public library bill; the radio bill twelve and one half times as large, the moving-picture bill twenty-two times as large, and the candy bill twenty-eight times as large as the public-library bill." Mr. Will Hayes informed the public the other day that 115,000,000 persons — not much less than the total population of the United States — now attend the motion-picture theaters every week. In three or four weeks, at most, they spend in this way as much as they spend on books, directly and indirectly, in an entire year. It has been estimated that Americans spend on automobile pleasure touring $3,000,000,000 a year — or twenty times their expenditure for recreational reading.

They even spend on greeting cards, such as most bookstores sell, considerably more than they spend for books. These illustrations could be multiplied and improved upon by any one who is apt at figures and who has, as I have not at this writing, the results of the 1930 Census at his disposal.

I do not present such figures as an indictment of American taste. It is as foolish to indict a nation for having bad or perverted taste as to indict a region for being too flat. Moreover, Americans might conceivably possess good taste and still not express it by buying or reading books. The motion picture and the radio might become — though as yet they distinctly are not — an adequate cultural substitute for books. A book is not a standardized article of commerce, like coal or soap, to be recommended indiscriminately to all comers. It is of no use to grow indignant because people do not read more and read more seriously. But it is fair to ask, in a spirit of scientific curiosity, why it is that so few books, measured by volumes marketed, and especially so few good books, float to the top of our American ocean of print and our Noah's flood of recreational facilities.

To this problem there are two possible approaches. One is to examine the present methods of producing and distributing books, and the results of those methods. Are all those who would read books if sufficiently stimulated being reached by the prevailing system? If not, can they be reached, and if so, how? If there are tendencies leading in this direction, what are those tendencies? I shall devote most of the space in the chapters to come to this line of inquiry. The other approach, which logically follows the first, but concerning which there are fewer facts available, is to ask why it is that people who do have opportunities to read do not do so. If we could clear up this mystery, we would throw light on a profound — I might

almost say an ominous — factor in American life. I shall come back to this subject in due season.

Few publishers and booksellers realize, or at least few admit, how grossly undersold America is in the commodity of solid reading matter. Few, on the other hand, are completely satisfied with either the methods or the results of the present system of publishing and distributing books. What is for the students a baffling but academic problem is for them a matter of bread and butter — and the butter is, on the whole, spread very thin on a transparent slice of bread. Not only are books a luxury for the purchaser. They are also, by and large, something of a luxury for those who deal in them. There are, as we shall see, conspicuous exceptions. But few who know the situation well will deny that commercial acumen applied to the book trade brings smaller rewards than the same sort and degree of ability applied to almost any other business enterprise. The truth is the more marked in the handling of literary merchandise of high quality.

It may be argued that those who engage in the commendable enterprise of improving the thought and taste of their fellows ought not to expect dividends in cash. But since ours is a commercial civilization, and since we expect the making and marketing of good and beautiful motor cars, radio sets, clothes, and a hundred other articles to be profitable, there is no logical reason — unless it be a weakness in our civilization itself — why the making of good and beautiful books should not also be profitable. If books are to enter into our national life as completely as do other means of amusement and recreation, we must be induced to demand them and to make at least a small sacrifice to get them. But it is clear that nine out of ten of us are not yet ready to do this. We can afford books, but we do not afford them.

The result is, as the frankest and most clear-sighted of

publishers have never been slow to admit, that the book business, in the words of Robert Sterling Yard, is "the worst business in the world." "It will take you only two or three minutes," said Mr. Yard, "to name over all the general publishers in America. It might take you only two or three seconds to name the publisher who got rich out of general book publishing alone; but it may take you two or three years — or forever — to discover him. For, as the countryman exclaimed on seeing his first giraffe, 'Thar ain't no sech critter.'" The words were written sixteen or seventeen years ago. Since that time the number of publishers and the number of books sold have considerably increased. New houses have launched themselves on the proceeds of cross-word puzzle books or some other lucky strike. Some very astute minds have made their way into the business, especially in New York City. Some of the old and dignified traditions have been thrown overboard, even by the older and more dignified houses. New ideas in publicity, advertising, and selling have been successfully tried out. New outlets have been opened up. The new dollar book, amid cheers and jeers, has made its bow. Small as it still is, the book-reading and book-buying public has steadily grown. Ten per cent a year is perhaps a reasonable guess at its rate of growth. But the fact remains that the rewards of book publishing are not yet in proportion to its risks or its importance.

But if the book publisher is driven to eke out his tangible rewards by such intangible ones as the dignity of his connection with literature, the pleasure of having literary friends and acquaintances, and the knowledge that at least some of the books he brings to light may be among the permanent treasures of mankind, the bookseller has need of even more of the intangibles. In later chapters I shall attempt to outline the financial problems of publishers and retailers. It is enough to say here that, despite

what seems to the layman a generous discount, the bookseller finds it hard, perhaps increasingly hard, if he clings to the older traditions of his trade, to make both ends meet. If he is independent, as he usually is if bookselling is his principal business, his plight is like that of most other small merchants. Unlike the grocer and the hardware retailer, however, he is selling something that most people very cheerfully manage to do without. Moreover, he is selling something not quite so perishable as fruit, but far more perishable than canned goods. As the publisher speculates in a large way, so the bookseller must speculate in a small way.

The result is that the booksellers in the United States who are making a success out of books alone, or books principally, are surprisingly scarce. Perhaps there are not more than a dozen or twenty really successful all-round bookstores in the country. An even smaller number stand out distinctively. A single bookstore in Boston does approximately one per cent of the general retail book trade of the United States. A certain nationally known bookstore in another and larger city has been steadily increasing the volume of its business. Almost as steadily, it discovered not long ago, its net profits had been diminishing.

There have been and continue to be more or less friendly disputes between publishers and retailers as to the share of the customer's dollar that each should have. The retailer is receiving a larger share than he used to. Many publishers believe that the trade would flourish if the discount were reduced, many booksellers that the retail book merchant cannot survive if it is not increased. But each, I believe, realizes that something more than a few cents more or less on the turnover is involved in the present unsatisfactory situation. Each is caught in the vicious circle resulting from the fact that an increase in the quantity of a given edition sold means a reduction in costs, while the

hope of quantity sales leads publishers to issue and booksellers to stock a growing number of titles. The book trade is habitually engaged in digging a thousand holes in order to strike one oil well. It is organized on that basis. This system is, of course, not regrettable if it is the only way of bringing about a fruitful experimentation in the writing of books. But it has its grave economic drawbacks. It leads to the production each year of hundreds of books which cannot be said in any true sense to be *published*.

Because the traditional system of publishing and distributing books does not meet the needs of the modern situation, various experiments have been attempted, some of them successful, others not. One experiment, and a very important one, is the rental library. Rental libraries have existed in the United States for a generation or so, but not until the past few years have they grown to large proportions. Five years ago, according to an estimate I have already referred to, about one half of one per cent of all the general trade books published in the United States were sold to rental libraries. The number is now, as we have seen, nearer eight per cent. This is a small enough figure compared with the estimate of from sixty to eighty per cent for England, where the rental library is a Problem with a capitalized initial letter, yet it is important as a trend. It is also perplexing, for no one knows whether the patrons of rental libraries are backslid bookbuyers or potential bookbuyers. If the latter they are an encouraging system, if the former the case is quite otherwise.

Another experiment is the publication in growing quantities of books to be retailed at bargain prices. These include imprints of the classics, popular reprints of successful current books which have exhausted their market at the standard price levels, and issues of new books at cut rates. This last is the outstanding publishing adventure of 1930 as

well as a feature of most of the book clubs, though it was not the policy of the original book club. The book clubs are an experiment in marketing which deserves and will have a chapter of its own. All that I need say of them just now is that they arose out of dissatisfaction with existing marketing methods — or, to put the same thing in another way, out of a realization that existing marketing methods were both wasteful and self-limited. They are more important as symptoms, however, than as cures. Another development which shows the old system bulging at the seams has been the increasing sale of books, mostly at less than standard prices, in drug-stores, cigar-stores, and other places where they were not formerly to be had. More than ever before books — not always good books but nevertheless *books* — are being placed where the man in the street can hardly help stumbling over them. I mention these new factors quite uncritically, leaving to a later chapter the discussion of their places in the growth of the book-reading habit in America. I list them here as evidence that the book trade is in a state of unrest.

Strictly speaking, the public libraries enter into the "book trade" only as purchasers of books. Indirectly they may, and probably do, increase the market for books by encouraging the book-reading habit. But since my purpose in inquiring into the book trade is merely to find out how well or how ill it serves the purpose of getting books from authors to readers, the picture would be incomplete if I did not also pry into the manner in which the public libraries operate toward a similar end. We have already glanced at a few rough statistics of public libraries, and have seen that, like most statistics dealing with books, they are far more impressive in bulk than when applied per capita. Nevertheless, though the libraries have so far failed to make us a book-reading nation, they have been more successful in getting books read than have the pub-

lishers and booksellers. Habitual bookbuyers probably number not more than four or five per cent of the population, whereas libraries, where they exist at all, reach between twenty-five and fifty per cent and sometimes even more of the population.

The difference, I am convinced, is not entirely to be accounted for by the fact that library service is free. As a matter of fact, library service is only apparently free. Even where a building has been given to the community by some generous benefactor, salaries and maintenance ordinarily come out of the public treasury and so out of the taxpayer's pocket. It costs from six to ten cents to circulate a book once in the average American public library. But, no matter who pays the cost, the public library has become a habit wherever it has entrenched itself. It has occupied a conspicuous building and has usually received favorable publicity in the newspapers. Very often of late years its services have been adroitly advertised. Some of the persons who have availed themselves of these services probably could not have afforded to buy books. Yet I am inclined to believe that there are multitudes more who could have afforded books as well as they could afford motion-picture shows or radio sets if the desire to possess them had been present in their minds. I do not say that these persons should have bought books instead of borrowing them. I do contend that many of them would have done so had the publishers and the booksellers been as energetic, as sympathetic, and as closely aware of the public's tastes and needs as the librarians have been.

But the librarians, though doing wonders with their thirty-two cents per capita per annum, still fall short of their potential influence, just as the publishers and booksellers do. The relative failure in each case is due to the same general cause. There are no two ways of looking

at it. America has not been "sold" on books. Every experiment in heretofore undeveloped territory seems to show that our people want books whenever they are made to realize what books have to offer them. They even want good books. But this want has not been crystallized into what the economists call an "effective demand."

This unsatisfactory state of affairs is not new. We may be able to get a perspective on it by looking at it historically.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST THREE HUNDRED YEARS

The American book trade is too old to be called an infant industry, too undeveloped to be considered mature. It has been nearly three hundred years in attaining its present stature — or, as some cynical persons would say, in arriving at its present predicament. It is a child of past centuries, still imperfectly at home in the present one. I shall skim rapidly through those past centuries for such light as they may throw on the as yet unsolved problem of how to get books to American readers who need them, but do not know they need them.

As a new country America naturally began by being completely dependent on the older countries for its reading matter. The earliest arrivals, especially the clergy, brought small libraries with them. When new books were wanted they ordered them from England. The second generation in America probably lapsed away from bookishness, as men do in a new country. But eventually there came booksellers, who were also printers and publishers, and who kept imported books in stock. In the humble and limited way befitting a raw colony, publishing began. The presses of the English colonists in North America were almost exactly a century behind those of the Spanish in Mexico, who got out complete books at least as early as 1540. It was not until 1638 or 1639 that the Cambridge Press, ancestor of the present Harvard University Press, published "Pierce's Almanac." If this was a book, it was the first one published in North America. Otherwise it must rank merely as the first American pamphlet. Steeven Daye's "The Whole Booke of Psalmes,

Faithfully Translated into English Metre," which was issued in 1640 from the same press, was unquestionably a book — and probably also the six best-sellers of its day rolled into one. Between 1638 and 1692 the Cambridge Press was kept reasonably busy, for it turned out 205 publications of all kinds. Between 1665 and 1674 it had the field all to itself, for an official mandate prohibited the establishment of presses in the Colony elsewhere than at Cambridge. Its provender, consisting mainly of sermons, almanacs, and laws, was not of the sort that even a seventeenth-century censor could criticize.

With this early start, and with its sober Puritanical background, Massachusetts was for a long time the most bookish of the Colonies. In 1740, when its population was under ten thousand, Boston had five printing shops. In 1724, the booksellers of Boston held what was probably the first book-trade convention in America, with the object of giving the price level a flip upward. It was the Boston booksellers, too, who in 1804 issued what is said to have been the first American book-trade catalogue. Up to that date, incidentally, as recorded in this catalogue, 1138 books had been published in what is now the United States.

If Massachusetts was at one end of the literary scale, the Old Dominion was at the other. In 1638, Lord Culpepper, then governor, issued an order "to allow no person to use a printing press on any occasion whatever." And no one did, permanently, for forty-seven years thereafter. As late as 1740 neither Maryland nor Carolina had printing presses. William Bradford printed his first book in Philadelphia in 1686, came to New York City in 1693, and for thirty years had the monopoly of the entire printing trade of Manhattan. Young Benjamin Franklin set up shop for himself in Philadelphia in 1728, the year after he established the famous Junto which later grew into the American Philosophical Society. The printing

business naturally expanded as the colonists were drawn into the bitter political controversies which preceded the Revolution. On the eve of the war there were fifty printing presses in the Colonies, papering the land with sermons, almanacs, and seditious pamphlets. In those primitive days printing, publishing, and bookselling were still frequently carried on under the same roof. Publishing and bookselling almost always were. The printer Keimer, for whom Franklin worked as a young man in Philadelphia, also had a stationer's shop. Franklin's brother James and later Franklin himself combined their other printing work with the issuance of a newspaper.

From the very beginning sales of original American books were hurt by the competition of imported English books. The early American printers saw no harm in pirating editions of English publications, but at first they could not produce these editions as cheaply as the originals could be imported. They then combined, as seems to have been their purpose at the Boston booksellers' conference in 1724, to raise prices. The distinction between bookseller and printer was still an academic one. The book agent seems to have flourished at a very early period. It was in 1685 that Cotton Mather complained: "I am informed that the Minds and Manners of many people about the country are much corrupted by foolish Songs and Ballads which the Hawkers and Pedlers carry into all parts of the country." There is no reason to suppose that the Reverend Mr. Mather's opposition did much to diminish this deleterious practice, for by 1685 the old Puritan theocracy was in its declining days. A book peddler of a much later date was Parson Weems, author of the famous "Life" of Washington and probable inventor of the cherry-tree anecdote. Parson Weems would be invaluable even to-day to any subscription publisher. He was a man of parts and prestige, and he knew his public

as well as he knew his books. Thus the main features of the book trade were developed, though doubtless in rudimentary form, very early in the life of the Republic.

The first attempt to organize American booksellers on a national basis was made in 1801 by Matthew Carey, who founded the American Company of Booksellers. Carey was a member of the Philadelphia firm of Carey and Lea and author of "Essays on Political Economy," in which he advocated the principle of the protective tariff. His Company of Booksellers, which had members in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, held four "literary fairs," in four successive years, at which their goods were jointly offered for inspection and sale. A contemporary effort to make bookselling more profitable was the organization of the New York Association of Booksellers in 1802, "to lessen the number of imported books, which are now becoming exceedingly advanced in price."

Publishers at the same time were clubbing together to get out American editions of standard works. The Classic Press Series, which was started in 1803, was an example of this sort of co-operative publishing, by means of which it was hoped that the competition of imported English books could be met. As the resources of American publishers increased, they published more foreign titles, and in course of time could print books in America more cheaply than they could be imported. In 1820 some seventy per cent of all the titles published in the United States were foreign reprints. Up until 1853 the house of Harper had issued 722 books of American origin and 827 reprints. But the proportion of reprints declined until, by 1856, eighty per cent of the books published were by American authors. Curiously enough, this is about the proportion prevailing at the present day. The overpowering prestige of English books lasted longer than their numerical superiority. As late as the beginning of the

present century, best-seller lists were as often as not made up entirely of books by English writers.

Although there were no copyright laws touching foreign books until 1891, many American publishers did honor to their occupation by paying royalties on English books and by respecting one another's prior rights in such books. But the increasing competition after the Civil War led to a great deal of conscienceless pirating. In some respects, indeed, this, and not the earlier periods, may be thought of as the dark age of American publishing. A few honored and successful firms, some of them still existing, kept their record clean. But the age was one in which business men felt justified in exploiting anything that could be pried loose, provided it was possible to do so and keep out of jail.

The period before 1860 saw some large sales. Webster's Spelling Book is said to have reached a total circulation of 30,000,000; Abbott's "Rollo," "Lucy," and "Jonas" books attained a total of 1,250,000, and, which was worse, encouraged a flock of imitators; Arthur sold 1,000,000 copies of his books; Washington Irving's sales reached 800,000; Headley's "Napoleon and His Generals" and "Washington and His Generals" went to 200,000; Griswold's "Poets and Prose Writers of America" were bought by 300,000 readers; and McGuffey's famous series of school readers, started in 1836, are said to have reached the appalling total of between 80,000,000 and 90,000,000.

But the book trade was chaotic, uncertain, and not too profitable. In fact, it is not possible to find a time in its whole history when every one involved was satisfied and few times when to at least some observers it did not seem to be on the highroad to ruin. Constant efforts at reform were made, but most of them failed. The Book Publishers' Association, organized in 1855 under the title of The New York Publishers' Association, represented such an at-

tempt. It lasted until 1861. The years that followed were more than commonly trying to every one. Semiannual trade auction sales had the unfortunate effect of killing sales at the original prices, just as the dumping of publishers' remainders does now. The subscription-book business sometimes seemed to be only a modified form of burglary. At its best it was a thorn in the side of the trade-book publishers.

The custom grew up among retail booksellers of cutting the list prices. The publishers themselves made lavish discounts of thirty, forty, or even a larger per cent, as Downing Palmer O'Hara says, in a study from which many of my facts are taken, "to nearly every one who asked for them." Naturally this practice hurt the booksellers' business. By 1870 the situation was critical. Or rather it might be more accurate to say that it was more critical than usual. In 1873 a new movement began with the formation of the Booksellers' Protective Association at Cincinnati. The name was soon changed to The American Book Trade Union, publishers as well as retailers were admitted, and the declaration that "underselling is the crying evil of the book trade" was cheered to the echo. A number of regional associations carried on work similar to that of the national body. But public opinion, then sensitive toward syndicates of all sorts, was aroused and some of the newspapers were bitter in their denunciations of the "booksellers' ring." "Book butchers" became active, too, cutting prices recklessly and raising havoc with those who adhered to the Union's discount rules. The Union died a natural death at a hot summer meeting held in Philadelphia during the Centennial Exposition of 1876.

The book trade survived. In fact, for an invalid it has always had a tenacious hold on life. But the road to ruin seemed straighter and wider than before. Booksellers stocked up on volumes disposed of at a fraction of their

value at the annual or semiannual trade sales and then were unable or unwilling to buy the newer books as they came out. These trade sales continued until 1890, though the practice of auctioning off "remainders" of editions not otherwise marketable has continued to the present day. Subscription books continued to cut deeply into the "trade book" market. After the Civil War many disabled veterans took up the book agent's profession. Some gigantic sales were made by this method — nearly 250,000 of Greeley's "American Conflict," 800,000 copies of "The Royal Path of Life," 650,000 of Grant's "Memoirs." A single firm in Chicago employed 1500 canvassers — and a rough, tough lot they were. So bad was the book agent's reputation that Sherman refused to allow his memoirs to be sold by subscription, for fear that undue pressure to buy would be brought upon his old soldiers. But some of America's most eminent authors, Mark Twain among them, for a long time sold their books by subscription only. Another demoralizing influence was the sale of cheap and badly printed foreign reprints, which could be had for between ten and twenty-five cents. If all this were not bad enough, the booksellers were hard hit by the department stores and "bazars," which adopted the policy, since continued, of undercutting. One or two booksellers tried to get even by offering dry goods at cut prices, but this was more effective as a gesture than as a merchandising method.

How to maintain prices became the publishers' great problem. While other departments of American business were buoyantly, if sometimes crudely and brutally, aggressive, the book business stood with its back against the wall, fighting for survival. It may not be far out of the way to surmise that it was at about this time that the production and popularization of books in America fell behind the general progress of the nation. Heroic efforts were nevertheless being made. In December, 1894, Henry

Holt organized the Booksellers' League, which soon had 325 members. The old American Publishers' Association was started in 1900, its members mutually agreeing, as Mr. O'Hara puts it, that "all copyrighted books, except schoolbooks, fiction, new editions, and subscription books, should be published at net prices." They agreed also that they would not sell to dealers who retailed their books at less than the net price.

To supplement the work of the Publishers' Association a national association of booksellers was formed in 1901. Its purposes were "to elevate the character of the general trade of publishing and selling books; to bring into closer union all persons engaged in the publication and sale of books, to the end that they may better understand the trials and difficulties to which they are severally subjected, and in order that they may actively co-operate with each other to correct abuses relating to the general book trade; to secure freedom from unjust or unlawful discrimination; to secure the co-operation and to foster the interests of the allied trades, whose members engage more or less in the sale of books; to encourage more friendly and cordial relations between persons engaged in the general book trade, and to establish rules and regulations designed to promote the best interests of all members."

Every one agreed that the lion ought to lie down with the lamb. Every one agreed that the book business was, as usual, in a demoralized condition. Books listed at $1.50 cost the publisher 40 cents, were sold to the bookseller for about 81 cents, and were retailed by him at from $1.12 to $1.20. The number of booksellers, which had been 3000 a generation earlier, was said to have dropped to 500. But the bad conditions were not easy to correct. The retail price of books sold in the regular bookstores, including fiction, rose to $1.25 or more for the type of book which had been listed at $1.50 and which

had sold at from thirty to thirty-eight cents lower. But in 1903 the department stores around New York City were buying popular books for 81 cents a copy and selling them at 79, 69, and even 59 cents, making up for their losses by the additional trade drawn into their places of business.

The booksellers complained bitterly. About 1905 one of them wrote to a New York newspaper: "I'll wager that inside of two years there will not be a bookshop left in New York, and I wager further that there is not a man in New York who is making a living selling books alone." A Boston bookseller testified in 1906, "I do not believe that there is to-day a single retailer of new books who during the past five years has actually made a living from the sale of new books alone." The attempt of the Publishers' Association to correct the price-cutting situation by refusing to deal with retailers who practiced it led to a famous suit by a New York department store. The suit went against the Association, which soon after faded quietly out of existence. The National Association of Book Publishers, its successor, leans so far backward in its efforts to avoid even the faint suspicion of price-fixing that it is almost impossible to induce two or more of its members to discuss retail prices at all under the same roof. Department stores continue to sell below the list price, but apparently the policy does not produce in publishers and booksellers the mental anguish that it once did. For one thing, it has been discovered that the department store clientèle is not the same as the bookstore clientèle and that the department stores may actually be helping the booksellers and publishers by making new readers.

With this episode we come well down into the modern period, whose principal features will form the subject of the chapters that follow. After the dire prophecies that were prevalent around the turn of the century it is hard to see how the book trade, or at least the retail bookseller,

managed to survive at all. The fact that the trade did not die, despite the complication of diseases under which it suffered for so long, must keep any one who carefully considers the history of books in America from being completely pessimistic about it. The doubt is not as to whether books — and good books — shall continue to be published, sold, and read. The doubt is as to whether the book trade can overleap its old fences and make us a book-reading nation.

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR — DEAD OR ALIVE

LET us now consider one very simple fact — so simple that it is generally overlooked: the book trade exists for one purpose and one purpose only, to bridge the gap between the author and his audience. The reasons why this should be done by means of paper and ink are technological and incidental. The spoken word came a long time before the written word, longer still before the printed word. The very name of the phonetic alphabet implies that it is meant to convey sounds — in an ideal case they would be conveyed in the author's voice. The earliest of authors were men who told their stories, perhaps also singing and dancing them. These stories, thousands of them, must have vanished into the star-flecked nights that gave them birth. Some were remembered, were joined with other stories, centered themselves about legendary heroes and became racial epics — the songs of Homer, the Norse sagas, and many another now obscure or lost.

These ancient songs were long handed down by memory before they were committed to writing. Writing itself began with efforts to preserve records by means of pictures. It was a long time before these pictures came to represent sounds. Finally this was accomplished. Now the author's very words, just as he meant them, could be preserved. The art of punctuation developed so that his pauses and emphases could be indicated also, though his intonations were lost. On this foundation the literature of all countries was built up — literature because it was based upon *litterae*, upon *letters*. After printing was invented, letters could be multiplied easily and inexpen-

sively. In comparatively recent times the idea that literature is something *written* came to dominate in men's minds and literary criticism has been largely based upon it.

But it is well to bear in mind, even in a book about books, that a book is an inadequate substitute for a man's or a woman's voice. It is well to bear in mind, too, that the book may be a temporary substitute, for the machinery which produces it is capable of vast improvement, and the product itself may be supplanted by something better. The phonograph and the radio have made possible the preservation and wide scattering of the actual voice. It is not impossible that improvements in these machines may enable the author to speak to us in a far more satisfactory way than by means of paper and ink. The book may disappear altogether, or become an antique, as the horse-drawn carriage has done. So, in laying emphasis upon the importance of books as cultural instrumentalities, I do not wish to be interpreted as regarding them as ideal or final. They are not. It is their contents that matter. What we need to know about the book trade is whether, here and now, it provides the best available means by which an author can speak to his fellowmen. What I shall have to say about the principles of book production and distribution would apply equally well to any future substitute for books.

The basic question before us, then, is whether the book trade, as at present carried on, makes the communication of ideas and emotions as easy as our present technical equipment would permit. If it does not, that fact is its indictment. I think, as far as the author of serious books is concerned, the trade will have to plead guilty. There is a long-established tradition that authors ought not to expect a living in return for authorship — that they should if necessary starve in garrets or hall bedrooms. Some of us take quite a lively pleasure in stories of authors who have

done precisely that. But it is doubtful that starvation was ever good for any author's creative powers, or that it will ever produce a civilized literature.

We cannot divorce the production of literature from the economic factor, nor has any age ever succeeded in doing so. As far back as we can go, poets and prose writers have been subsidized — by alms, by gifts from patrons, by fortunes fortuitously handed down to them, by their own earnings from other sources, or by payments from readers for what they have written. The production of literature is an entire existence for those who are called to it. It ought not to be parasitical. We do not know how greatly our literature has been impoverished because the laws of survival have kept alive amateurs and sycophants while the nobler spirits have been silenced. An author must live or he cannot write. He must live heroically if he is to write heroically. And it is impossible for him to live heroically if he has to wrest a living from the world by unheroic methods.

The art of writing, therefore, must have a dignified economic basis if the fullest creative powers of the most gifted individuals are to be evoked. The community must support the writer, even though not to the extent that it supports the engineer, the lawyer, the physician, and the business man. It must leave him free to write. I am aware that there are seeming exceptions to this rule. Books have been written at night by men who were clerks or laborers or farmers or business men or even editors during the daytime. Authors have been known to acquire a competence in other fields and then give their released energies to writing. But these are merely forms of subsidies, and costly ones at that, since they diverted creative energies to what was for the individuals concerned a relatively uncreative use.

There are, of course, one-book authors, who have just

so much literature in them, and no more. But even for them the writing of a book ought not to be an extravagance. Ours is admittedly a money civilization. But the grossness of a money civilization does not lie in the fact that it distributes large rewards, but that it does not distribute them to the right persons. A civilization that encourages real estate speculation or stock gambling, but does not encourage creative art, will get what it deserves. It will not produce a great literature. Let us consider just where in the scale of our own civilization stands, in so far as we can measure it by the standards of literary rewards. It will not, I am afraid, stand high.

There are no reliable statistics as to the number of writers and would-be writers, good, bad, and indifferent, now at large in the United States. The total of new titles, not counting translations and pamphlets, issued in 1929 was, as we saw, 8927. We may assume, if we like, that for every book published ten or twenty are written. There may be as many as one hundred thousand or even two hundred thousand individuals in the United States who are trying to write what they hope will turn out to be books. Only the publisher's reader or the literary agent knows what hopeless incompetence most of the resulting manuscripts represent. An infinitesimal fraction of them — but possibly not infinitesimal enough — are finally published. Yet this ratio between what is written and what is published, no matter how large we may assume it to be, is no cause for melancholy. No one can possibly object to a rigid selective system, provided it selects something worth saving. It would be a cause for rejoicing if a million Americans were trying to write books, first, because people who try to write can be counted on to read; second, because out of a million manuscripts we could expect to sort out more good books than we do out of a fifth or a tenth or a twentieth of that number. What is

plainly needed is not fewer manuscripts, but more discrimination among publishers.

When we turn from the possible total of potential writers to those who are actually earning a living by writing books, we find a sadly small group. The membership of The Authors' League is perhaps two thousand, and not all of these by any means are authors of books. At most there are probably not more than five thousand professional authors in the country, of whom a great many are not making a living out of their writing and of whom only a handful are making a living out of books alone. Even this handful, though they may earn a living wage out of books, in practically every case supplement it by income from other sources — from magazine serial rights, second serial rights, and often motion-picture rights.

"Book writing," said Constance Smith, in an article in The Authors' League "Bulletin," "is still an unprofitable field for the average writer. It is in selling to magazines with national circulation, to the motion pictures, to syndicates, to play producers, that the author makes his 'big' money. The magazine publisher, supported by advertising revenue, is in a position to offer excellent terms to the able creator of literary material, as is the motion-picture magnate by reason of the tremendous scale of his industry." No doubt the "able creator of literary material" manages to survive. But if he is obliged to address himself to the least common denominator of a magazine audience of one or two million or a motion-picture audience of twenty million people, his creativeness is certainly hampered. As well might we expect Cézanne to paint billboards without injury to his style.

Let us see what an author may hope to make from a book. Miss Smith's figures are instructive, and they check well enough with what one learns from other sources. A beginning author, or any other author not sufficiently well

established to have publishers bidding for his work, may expect to receive a royalty of ten per cent on the retail list price of the first 2500 or perhaps even the first 5000 copies of his book sold. After that the royalty rises by successive steps to 12½ to 15 per cent. Fifteen per cent is about the limit for all but the prodigiously successful, though royalties do sometimes go to 20 per cent. In Great Britain, incidentally, they start at 15 per cent and go to 20 per cent, but since average sales are smaller in that country the author nets less than he does in the United States.

As might be expected, the size of the royalty is a debated point between publishers on the one hand and spokesmen for writers on the other. The late Walter H. Page wrote rather bitterly on the subject a quarter of a century ago. "The present fashion of a part of the writing world," he said, "to squeeze the last cent out of a book and to treat the publisher as a mere manufacturer and 'boomer,' cannot last. It has already passed its high period and is on the decline. A self-respecting worm would have turned long ago. Even the publisher is now beginning to turn." But after the lapse of twenty-five years the turning is still incomplete, and the controversy as to who is the worm is still going on. In the next chapter I shall take up some of the publisher's problems and it will be easy to show that he rests on no bed of roses. But neither does the author — even the fairly well-known author.

Fifteen hundred copies is a reasonable sale for a first novel. I am taking the novel as an illustration because its price is more nearly standardized than those of non-fiction books. What applies to novels may apply even more forcibly to non-fiction, for many of the best non-fiction publications are limited by the nature of their subjects to a small fraction of the bookbuying public, which is itself a small fraction of the entire public. If, then, a

writer's book circulates 1500 copies, he will receive in royalties, at the common retail price of $2.50 a copy, some $325. Three thousand copies will bring in $725. If 15,000 copies are sold, with the rate rising to 12½ per cent at 2500 and to 15 per cent at 5000, the author will receive $5156.25. After that each successive thousand sold will bring him in $375. But Miss Smith has calculated that there are not more than 175 books published each year, out of the thousands of new titles, of which 15,000 copies or more are sold. If a writer publishes one book a year, his chance of getting into this class is something less than one in twenty-three.

Moreover, whereas formerly a book which reached a sale of 15,000 copies stood a very good chance of going higher, on the principle that a big snowfall grows faster than a little one, competition is now as keen above 15,000 as it is below. Book sales may be thought of as a pyramid with a very broad base and a very high but very thin top. If we slice across it at the 15,000 level, we leave some very famous names and also some very modest incomes below. For the sake of convenience we may say that a book that is worth its salt represents at least a year of an author's time. If it does not take a year to write — for one whose ideas flow freely can hammer out 2000 words of corrected copy in a working day — it takes a year to create. Authors who do more are probably spreading themselves out thinner and producing worse books. So we have the spectacle of authors whose books are good enough to pass the critical judgment of a publishing house receiving as little as $325 for a year of their lives, or about a dollar for each working day, and authors of really distinguished ability receiving a little over $5000 — in some cases less. A book which has a sale of 15,000 copies or more in a standard trade edition may be taken over by a reprint house, in which case the author will receive additional

royalties. But in this event it is success that breeds success.

I am talking of books, not of other markets for an author's work. However, it is impossible to consider authorship in the United States without considering all the possible markets. The stage, as a dependable source of revenue, we may leave out, for few writers of books are also successful writers of plays, and few books can be successfully adapted to the stage. The motion pictures have been in the past a market in which the novelist might occasionally find rich plunder. At the moment they are not a good market, for the reason that the coming of the "talkies" has made it seem expedient to make motion pictures either from stage plays or from stories written directly for the screen. At all events, a novel which has not been sufficiently popular to sell more than 15,000 copies will seldom be bought for motion-picture production, so that this market is practically closed to twenty-two out of every twenty-three novels. It is, of course, closed and double-locked against writers of non-fiction, and will remain so until "educational motion pictures" become really educational. There remain the magazine serial rights. Miss Smith points out that "while serials are well paid for, there are not more than fifteen or twenty magazines published in the United States, excluding the 'wood-pulps,' which buy serials. Even these [she adds] do not publish on an average more than four a year. Sixty or eighty openings for the sale of first serial rights, as compared to about 1500 fiction titles appearing each year, means severe competition and little chance for the writer of obscure reputation."

A writer may patiently build up a reputation over a period of years, and finally be in demand with magazine editors and in high favor with his publishers. But even then he may slip. The recent history of American author-

ship is strewn with moth-eaten reputations. Writers have their vogue and pass. One success does not guarantee another. A career may be represented by a slowly ascending and swiftly descending curve of popularity. The writers of non-fiction are to some extent free from the speculative elements which bewilder the novelist. A biography, a work of history, a book on popular science, may have a steady sale over a period of several years, whereas most novels at the end of six months are as dead as last week's newspaper. But with the increasing emphasis upon timeliness, this safety factor is diminishing, even in the field of non-fiction. The popularity of non-fiction is, of course, enormously encouraging. But popularity at a given moment implies unpopularity — or it might be better to say non-popularity — at another. A new biography, a new history, a new summary of scientific thought, crowds the old ones off the shelves.

Some publishers, as we shall see, work hard and with some success to spread the sales of their books, even of their fiction, over two or more seasons. But they are working against what is at present a strong and swiftly running tide. The publishers encounter this tide even in their attempts to continue the sale of standard works, particularly of works which they themselves first issued and in which they feel a proprietorial interest. In the cases of the older houses these standard books may be a real strength to the publishers and in a sense real competitors of present-day writers. For example, one well-known publisher puts out about a hundred and fifty new titles each year, but carries some three thousand titles in stock; of his annual sales sixty per cent are of books published in previous years. But more and more the titles of former years are being relegated to reprints and cheap editions, in which shape they find new markets.

The situation for the author, therefore, is substan-

tially this: he may be unable to find a publisher at all, in which case he will receive nothing for his pains — and, in the majority of cases, let me hastily add, deserve nothing; he may find a publisher and receive for a year's work about what one of Mr. Ford's employees in a good season will earn in two months; he may, if he is unusually gifted and also rather lucky, receive the income of a mediocre professional man in a small town; he may, in a few dozen cases, be as well provided with the world's goods as a corporation lawyer in the metropolis or a responsible official in a prosperous manufacturing organization. But writing is a lottery in which, even though few who have talent and application draw blanks, few indeed draw high prizes. To some extent it must and should remain a lottery. Creative writing, as the name implies, introduces something new into the world, the effects of which cannot be calculated in advance. Safe writing is stereotyped writing and has about as little cultural significance as the process of stamping butter-pats.

No writer worth bothering about would care to have the quality of adventure and uncertainty removed from his life. That quality, indeed, *is* his life. But writers do believe, and those who would wish to see America express itself significantly in literature may well believe with them, that the rewards of distinguished authorship should be larger and more secure than they are. Writing is a positive force from which only the completely illiterate can escape. The national habits of thinking are largely shaped by it, whether it occurs on billboards, in newspaper dispatches, in magazine advertising, or in books. If we do not pay for good writing we shall be afflicted with bad writing — as, in fact, we are.

Now, it will be obvious before we are through that the matter of the author's rewards cannot be settled offhand by asserting that the publishers should pay larger advances

or higher royalties, any more than the bookseller's problem can be solved by his receiving a larger discount from the publisher. If we take the cost accounts of the book trade at their face value, there is very little additional money to be squeezed out of what the retail customer pays. I put the matter in this way because cost accounting in the publishing business has been subjected to considerable critical examination, particularly by authors and their representatives. Publishers, for instance, have a habit of treating their net profit, if any, and the author's gross royalties, which always amount to at least a few dollars, as being comparable categories. But the publisher's net profit is arrived at by deducting the expenses of doing business from the total returns. The authors somewhat morosely point out that, if they also were allowed to deduct the expenses of doing business, their books would also show a loss, and in practically every case a larger loss than the publisher's. Thus, if an author must spend $6000 a year to support himself and his family, and if the book which he writes during that year brings in only $5156.25, he is obviously in the red to the extent of $843.75. No increase in royalties which publishers are likely to grant under existing publishing conditions can possibly set this matter right, though perhaps the instance will help the layman to understand why it is that authors demand larger royalties.

If increased royalties are not a solution — and not one American publisher will admit that they are — there is but one possible source of relief within the book trade. This is an increase in sales. Any author would rather sell thirty thousand copies of his book at a return to himself of fifteen cents a copy than half that number at a return of thirty cents a copy. He would not want to do this by means of a reduced royalty rate. He would be willing to do it by reduced retail prices. But though the experiment is now being tried, no publisher can guarantee that a

book put out at one dollar a copy will sell twice as much as one put at two dollars, or two and a half times as much as one put out at $2.50. In the specific instance of sales to book clubs the author does take a reduced royalty — sometimes a lump sum, sometimes a flat rate per volume — in return for larger sales. But there is a growing belief among authors that sales to book clubs are not advantageous. Younger authors, indeed, jump at them. The more sophisticated and the better established often fight shy.

No matter where we turn in the discussion we have entered upon in these pages, we are certain to come upon evidence that the publication and distribution of books in America is an underdeveloped business, an educational factor which has been sadly neglected. Publisher, bookseller, librarian, and author play an altogether too limited rôle in our national life. With all due respect to the other three I will venture to say that the author is the most important member of this quartet, and that under present conditions he is the hardest hit. The author *is* the wares the publishers and booksellers sell and the librarians lend. Without him no presses could turn and cobwebs would grow across the doors of the retail bookshop, and finally above the classic portals of the library itself. Yet America is not encouraging the writing of books — especially is it not encouraging the writing of serious books.

Almost any new development in the book trade would be a good development for the author — that is to say, for the rank and file of authors. In subsequent chapters, however, we shall see that publishers and booksellers also labor under the impression that life is not as kind to them as it ought to be.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENERAL PUBLISHER

The earliest publisher was any one who possessed presses, type, ink, and paper. Often his product was available only in a single bookshop, of which he himself might be the sole proprietor. More often he published his books with capital procured by taking orders in advance. The author himself frequently procured subscriptions before he wrote his book, as Johnson did with his great dictionary and Audubon with his "Birds of North America." In that case the author might hire a printer, being thus his own publisher, or he might share risks and expenses with a printer. Even in recent years there have been occasional instances of authors so sure of their sales that they cut out the usual publisher's profits by publishing their own books. Some firms — though the number of reputable organizations which do this is growing smaller — still make a practice of asking the author to share in the risks of the enterprise by paying all or part of the costs of publication. A few literary pirates publish — or rather manufacture — all their books in this way.

But the physical manufacture of a book is perhaps the least important part of a modern publisher's business. A book may be printed, and often is, without being *published*. Modern times, therefore, have brought about a division of functions. The author, as the first link in the chain, does the writing. An occasional publishing house not only prints and binds its own books, but also maintains retail outlets of its own. Even in this case, however, the business is so departmentalized that we may think of manufacturing, publishing, and retail selling as three different enterprises.

The publisher must obviously begin by procuring material to publish. It is he, collectively, who determines what our literature shall be like. He is the nominating convention from whose lists the successful candidates are chosen. He cannot, of course, publish books which the public will not buy and still remain in business, but he can and does exert a profound influence upon public taste by his selections from within the range of what the public might buy if offered. If he, collectively, fails to make wise selections, the book-readers of the country are the losers. We must, therefore, look at the general influences which bear upon his selections, and the methods which, in general, he follows.

The popular conception of a publisher is, perhaps, that of a man sitting at a desk with a huge pile of manuscripts before him. From these manuscripts he is thought of as selecting those which he will immortalize by making into books. There is only a small element of truth in this picture. The fact is that, if publishers had to depend upon manuscripts which come into their offices unsought-for, most of them would soon go out of business. Not that a sufficient flood of manuscripts does not reach their desks. And not that this flood of manuscripts goes unread. Every publisher who has written or spoken on this subject, so far as I know, has done his best to make the amateur author understand that *every* manuscript, without exception, receives attention. In the vast majority of instances very little attention is necessary in order to demonstrate that the unsolicited manuscript is also unacceptable.

Sometimes the first page tells the story. Sometimes it is necessary to read several pages, or a chapter, or the whole book. The usual practice among publishing houses is to delegate the task of winnowing out the chaff to the younger and less experienced members of the staff. One of the newer firms of my acquaintance reverses this process by

depositing every manuscript first on the desk of one of the heads of the firm. This gentleman, whose mind works like chain lightning, digs expertly into each outcropping placed before him, in the hope — almost always vain — of discovering a faint gleam of gold. If he suspects that a manuscript has possibilities, he passes it along to a subordinate for more leisurely reading. After that, if the first impression is sustained — it often isn't — the manuscript comes back to him for final appraisal. The advantage of this method is that the highly trained specialist sometimes discerns originality, the priceless thing for which all publishers are looking, in a manuscript that to the less experienced reader might seem merely inept.

The unsolicited manuscript is one of the saddest spectacles in the publishing business. We can faintly imagine what dreams, what vain ambitions, what heart-aches lie behind it. Mr. Lyman B. Sturgis, in "The Building of a Book," estimates that not more than twenty per cent of such manuscripts are worth serious consideration, and that not more than ten per cent are ever published. A large literary agency reports that, of five hundred book manuscripts submitted during a certain period, forty-eight were judged good enough to try out on publishers and twelve were actually accepted and published. In the cases of individual publishers the ratio of acceptances is much smaller. Mr. George Brett estimated in 1911 that "the number of books that appear in print is usually only about two per cent of the total number of manuscripts submitted to the publishers for examination." Houghton Mifflin Company publish about two hundred books a year out of about two thousand manuscripts received, but not more than four or five of the published manuscripts in a given year were wholly unsolicited. A large New York house receives approximately fourteen hundred wholly unsolicited manuscripts each year. Out of this mass it publishes a

yearly average of about one and one half. One of the heads of this house confessed that he would actually save money if he refused altogether to consider unasked-for manuscripts. He is unwilling to take such a radical step, partly because he hopes some day to discover a treasure among the trash, partly because he believes that the publishing channels should be kept open to the friendless and unknown author.

But if unsolicited manuscripts do not make up a large percentage of publishers' lists, where do those lists come from? On the margin between solicited and unsolicited, perhaps, are those manuscripts which are accepted by established and reputable literary agents as probably publishable and offered by these agents to publishers whose needs and tastes they are able to judge pretty accurately. Sometimes, too, a literary agent will find a writer to turn a publisher's idea into a book, or will evolve the idea himself and "sell" both author and publisher. The extent to which individual firms make use of agents varies greatly. Some rely on them to a large extent, particularly for filling last-minute gaps, others have relatively little recourse to them.

Next, for new titles, a publisher will naturally turn first to writers whose books he has successfully published, or whom he is in process of "building up." Among the new titles each season these established or arriving writers are the publisher's mainstay, for he can count on them for at least a profitable minimum sale. Some authors' books sell year after year between relatively narrow limits — say from five thousand to ten thousand copies. They earn a profit, though not a large one, for both themselves and their publishers, and are as reliable as a canning factory. Then there are manuscripts submitted by friends of authors or others connected with the house; there are books which the publishers have caused to be written — and this practice

is increasing year by year; and finally there are foreign books, sometimes English, sometimes translated from other languages.

The number of titles chosen by a given firm of publishers or by all the publishers together naturally has an effect upon the average circulation of each title. The total book sales in the United States in a given year can be roughly guessed in advance. The more titles, the smaller the average sale — though every publisher and every author hopes his books will cheat the average. Now, titles have been on the increase since the World War in almost every field, though, curiously enough, fiction titles, which numbered 2234 in 1901, have never since equaled that figure. The number for 1929, after a steady rise from the low point of 788 in 1918, was 2142. Juveniles and biography have grown notably during the past few years. But the more kittens, the less each kitten gets out of the saucer. I shall discuss a little later in more detail the effect of the increase of titles upon sales and sales methods. All we need to note here is that nearly every one admits that the number of titles ought to be kept down, but usually it is other people's titles rather than their own that they think should be reduced. Many publishers would endorse the position taken recently by Alfred R. McIntyre, president of Little, Brown and Company, in a contribution to "The Publishers' Weekly," though not all would find it easy to conform their own policies to it.

We have overproduction [said Mr. McIntyre], and overproduction should cease. How many publishers are there in America who, taking overhead into account, do not lose money on one fourth of the books they publish? . . . I can think of nothing in the world so beneficial to the book trade as a whole as for every important publisher in America to cut his output of new books ten per cent or more (probably considerably more). . . . Then the publisher would have more time and more

money to spend on his really worth-while books that now drop out of sight two, four, or six months after they are published; and the bookseller would have more space to give these worth-while titles, and more interest in trying to sell them. And each publisher's plant costs would be less, and his profits greater, and he *might* be disposed to share the extra profits with the booksellers by increasing his discounts. . . . It is within the power of the booksellers to force the publishers to adopt such a policy. They are not compelled to buy anything like all the books that are published, and I hope that they will more and more discriminate against the many new books that should never be issued.

The obvious difficulty involved in carrying out this suggestion is that there could not be unanimous agreement as to precisely what books "should never be issued." Moreover, though publishers might earn larger profits if they pared their lists down to "sure-fire" books, many good books as well as many bad ones might be left out. In view of which it is doubtful that the problem of too many titles can be solved offhand. One is not sure that it ought to be solved, at least in those terms. America ought to be able to digest all the good books that can be found, whether this means five thousand, ten thousand or fifteen thousand new titles every year.

Most publishers, whether they stand at the quantitative top with a list of six or seven hundred titles, or near the bottom with a list of six or seven, try to keep a fixed proportion between the different kinds of books they publish. Sometimes they do this by allotting a certain number of titles to each department, more often by giving each department a share of the appropriation for new production and leaving it some leeway to distribute this share among the titles it selects. It is only the largest houses, of course, which are departmentalized. The smaller ones do not have more choice than one or two men can handle.

The list once made up, there comes the problem of manufacturing and after that the problem of selling. And here we come upon the most striking fact about the book trade as at present carried on. Each new title is a separate business venture, which succeeds or fails with relatively little help from the publisher's general fund of "good-will." Each carries a title, a binding and a jacket meant to distinguish it from the ten thousand other books, foreign and domestic, which will be placed on the market during a given year. Each must struggle, sometimes with pathetically poor equipment, to get its head above the crowd, and the vast majority, being themselves the crowd, must fail. Sometimes the publisher knows that a given book will never pay its money costs. He issues it because it will add to his prestige or because he believes that he honors himself and his profession by doing so. But he cannot indulge in this luxury very often unless he is privately endowed —which does not happen to publishers — or unless he can more than balance his expected and unexpected losses by shrewdly calculated commercial successes. Consequently he has to be a competent business man. He should love literature, but his love for it will be of little use to himself or any one else if at the end of an average year he has not taken in more than he has spent.

The manufacturing cost of a book is a small part of its final retail price. Nevertheless, it has to be watched carefully, for it is by squeezing out pennies that publishers remain solvent. But here is the joker in the publishing business. If books can be manufactured in large quantities, the unit cost will naturally be less than when they are manufactured in small quantities. The publisher, therefore, has to decide between issuing a larger number at a smaller unit cost and running the risk of not selling all of them, or of getting out a smaller number which will cost more per unit, but which he can be fairly sure of selling.

Publishers' cost estimates vary so much that even professional accountants find it difficult to reconcile them. Let us, for the moment, take an individual small publisher's guess as to the manufacturing cost of a novel or other book selling at retail for $2.50. It is a 12mo edition, with 325 pages. On an edition of 5000 copies, the paper costs 8 cents a copy, the printing 9 cents, the binding about 22 cents, the jacket about 2 cents — a total of 41 cents. If 10 per cent is added for wastage and review copies, the cost comes up to a little more than 45 cents.

But now suppose that the book becomes popular and the happy publisher is able to sell from 25,000 to 50,000 copies or more. The unit cost now falls to 5½ cents for paper, 2½ for printing, 12 for binding, half a cent for the jacket — a total of 20½ cents — or perhaps 22 cents if wastage is counted in. The author's royalty will have risen from 25 cents a copy to 37½ cents, but even when the publisher has parted with this additional small change, he will have an extra profit of more than 10 cents on each copy for himself. Some of this will go to extra advertising — but we have not come to that yet. Another publisher — this time a much larger one — splits the consumer's $2.50 somewhat as follows: retailer's discount, $1; author's royalty, 31 cents; manufacturing cost, 45 cents; general overhead, 50 cents; special promotion, 9 cents; putative profit, 15 cents.

These figures will naturally vary somewhat from publisher to publisher, according to the magnitude of the business, taken as a whole, the methods of bookkeeping, the acumen of the publisher in dealing with printers, the quality of material used, and the market fluctuations of materials and other costs. One or two of the larger publishers maintain their own presses. This is an economy if they are able to keep the machinery continuously busy and to that extent may bring down their manufacturing

costs. But as nearly as can be estimated the average manufacturing cost of the average new book for general circulation will range between 16 and 18 per cent of the retail price. We shall come a little later to the subject of paper books, reprints, and other cheap editions; and we shall then have to consider the effect of retail price upon circulation. For the present it is enough to know that even a considerable reduction in the cost of making books would not, if other items remained the same, have a decisive effect upon retail prices.

The shaving of these costs is of importance in keeping publishers solvent or in enabling them to provide modestly for their families, but it cannot make the difference between a retail price that the mass of people can afford and one they cannot. Indeed, there has been a marked tendency in certain fields to improve the binding, paper, and typography of trade books and increase the retail price accordingly. Some publishers profess to find no great difference between the sales of a typical non-fiction book at $4 and those of a similar volume, with no more intrinsic value, at $5. They charge what they think the traffic will bear. But this raises one of the most perplexing questions about book distribution. The practice rests upon the assumption that there is a public which will purchase biographies — or a book of any other type one cares to mention — and that this public is relatively inelastic in numbers. That is, though it *cannot* be counted upon to buy a certain number of copies of a given biography, it *can* be counted upon to buy a certain number of copies in the field of biography each season. This number tends to increase, with such setbacks as the book business, in common with other kinds of business, occasionally experiences.

But would it not grow more rapidly if the average biography were priced as cheaply as the average novel? And would not the circulation of the average novel expand more

rapidly if new books could be priced as cheaply as reprints? These are questions which have recently been very much to the fore and which I shall refer to in a later chapter. They are academic questions on the basis of the costs I have just quoted. It is perhaps idle to go deeply into the cost accounting of the experimental dollar novel. It is certainly impossible at the present stage of that experiment. The reprint houses can throw some light on the subject and we shall come to them in due season. It is enough to say here that the publishers of new dollar novels are in effect starting a new business. There is little in the past experience of general publishing to guide them.

Until the dollar book made its appearance in the book trade's china shop, few publishers priced their output according to actual cost, though the practice of doing so was possibly increasing. They were — and in most cases still are — inclined to price them to secure the highest possible return, which may mean a low rate for some books and a high rate for others. Certain kinds of books, of course, have had a customary price, or price range. This has increased as costs of production and distribution have increased, but probably somewhat more rapidly than costs. Prior to May, 1930, it was possible to say that the novel which not long ago used to sell for $2 was bringing $2.50, the mystery story, which held to the $2 price longer than its more sedate contemporaries, was showing an inclination toward the higher level, and the $3.50 book of some years past was in many instances retailing for $5. But price-cutting introduces a new element — and, one hopes, a new audience. It may swing the general curve of retail book prices downward. It may divide book-readers into two classes — a group which is willing to pay for artistic printing and binding and a larger group of individuals who will accept anything that is legible and will hold together, provided it contains something they want to read.

In any case I do not think it is yet time to burn the funeral incense over the old-line publisher, though we may regret that he has not succeeded in impressing his high standards of content and workmanship upon a wider public. I think we may consider his cost and price problems as still pertinent. Nor should we conceive of him as hide-bound and reactionary. He laid the foundation of the American book trade. He is still its mainstay. Let me illustrate my point by describing some of the policies of one distinguished and successful though not ancient New York house. The head of this house prices his books at the nearest twenty-five cents to their actual cost, plus discounts and a reasonable profit. For him each book is in fact a separate enterprise, which must if possible carry its fair share of the general overhead and earn its own returns. He does not like to deal in general averages. There is no doubt that the number of bookbuyers who can be induced to pay comparatively high prices, whether or not based on such bookkeeping as this publisher has adopted, is growing. Just now the assertion may seem ironic. Yet it can be demonstrated. Some twenty years ago the best non-fiction seller was Thayer's "Life of John Hay," of which 18,000 copies were sold at $5 during the first year. A few years ago Hendrick's "Life and Letters of Walter Page" sold 76,000 copies at $10 each in the same length of time. About 35,000 copies of Sandburg's "Lincoln" were sold at $10 a copy before the cheaper edition was printed, and another 75,000 or more after the book went on sale at $3. Count Keyserling's "Travel Diary," published at $10, sold 20,000 copies. A quarter of a million copies of Papini's "Life of Christ" were disposed of at $3.75 each. The millions demand cheaper books, perhaps. The thousands do not seem to.

The same New York publisher mentioned above makes a policy of carrying over as many books as possible from

season to season, even when they belong in a class which ordinarily perishes with the season in which it sees the light. Most fiction which does not "catch on" — and that means most fiction — dies within from three to six months of the date of publication. There are many successful books which do not outlast the half-year. No one knows when the "ceiling" will be reached, or why, but sales sometimes drop off abruptly almost overnight. It is a happy publisher who can make his ascending and descending curves of sales gradual. Thus "Main Street," running through four successive half-years, sold 45,000 in the fall of 1921; 185,000 in the spring of 1922; 150,000 in the fall of 1922; and 20,000 in the spring of 1923. Later, when there were no more large numbers of buyers at the standard price, it was put into a cheap edition, in which, somewhat to the surprise of many who had watched its earlier sales, it went to 180,000. Something would certainly be gained if books of serious but more modest appeal could be kept alive longer. But the great majority of books are like styles in women's clothing; they are soon crowded out by new vogues which are not necessarily better, and which may even be worse, but which have the supreme virtue of novelty.

Let us return to the publisher at the point when he has his completed book in hand. He has, as far as the public is concerned, an entirely new commodity. Some books are born with a wealth of "good will," either because of the reputation of the author or because of the popularity of the subject. The publisher's own "good-will" — his reputation for publishing good books — counts for something, just how much no one knows. One or two publishers have striven, not unsuccessfully, to popularize their trademarks. With booksellers a trademark does count for something. But there is no evidence that the average bookbuyer often notices the publisher's imprint or could

tell after reading the book from whose presses it came. Moreover, the books on a publisher's list compete among themselves. They cannot be propped up by anything but their own merits, those merits being judged strictly by the public's demand for them. If the publisher is to prosper, a fair percentage of them, instead of depending on his existing reputation for their sales, must definitely add to it.

The publisher's relations with jobbers and other middlemen I shall consider a little later. As the book trade is now organized, his task is, first, to sell the book directly or indirectly to the retail bookseller, second, to make it known to the general public. He usually refuses the bookseller the return privilege for unsold copies, but unless he can move his books off the booksellers' shelves, he will find the market for his subsequent publications curtailed. He begins his campaign for a given book — usually one of many "given books" — some months in advance of publication by sending out his salesmen with "dummies" (that is, covers with a few specimen pages) and probably also the paper "jackets" of the volume in preparation. The list of which the projected book is a unit will sometimes run into scores of titles and cover almost every field of literature. The salesmen make their rounds, usually, at least four times a year. The larger cities are visited more often, and in New York the larger buyers are solicited practically every week-day. The rôle of the salesman is an important one, since no bookseller can hope to read all the books he buys or even to be acquainted with the authors of all of them. The good salesman must possess a sense of moderation, since he cannot succeed in the long run by inducing the retailer to overbuy. Next to the publisher or the publisher's readers, as a matter of fact, the salesman has more than any one else to say as to what the public will be offered in the way of books, and therefore what the public will read.

Aside from the intrinsic merits of the book, the salesman

has, like any other member of his profession, several selling points. One, of course, is the price of the book to the retailer — that is to say, the discount. Sometimes he will offer an extra bait — for instance, one free copy for every ten copies ordered. But the tendency is for discounts to become stabilized in proportion to the quantities bought. They may range as low as 33⅓ per cent — rarely lower for books of a general nature. They may go as high as 45 or even 50 or more per cent to large buyers, such as jobbers, news companies, and large circulating library chains. In the case of the book clubs they may run to 70 per cent — but that is another story. The average is about 40 per cent for the whole trade in general books, and shows an inclination to increase.

Let us see what this means in the case of a $2.50 book. The publisher will have spent about 45 cents in manufacturing each copy of the first edition. He will have obligated himself to pay the author from 25 to 37½ cents. His editorial expenses and advertising appropriation will have added perhaps 51½ cents. He will therefore be out of pocket between $1.21½ and $1.33. He will sell the book, if the average discount of 40 per cent is allowed, for $1.50. This will leave him between 17 and 28½ cents to carry this particular book's share of the general overhead, to meet losses on other books, and for profit. From these figures the reason why publishers do not as a rule grow extravagantly wealthy ought to be apparent. It is also apparent, of course, that they can add considerably to their gains if they can sell enough copies of a particular book to cut their unit manufacturing costs in half — which, as we have seen, can sometimes be done after the first few thousand copies have been disposed of.

Even before the book is published, advertising space has been employed in the trade publications to arouse the expectations of the booksellers. With actual publication a

campaign directed at the general public begins. In most cases it cannot be much of a campaign, for the usual practice is to spend on advance advertising a certain percentage — usually about ten per cent — of the advance sales, and the advance sales, like the total sales, of the average book are small. A few hundred dollars is all that is usually available, and as advertising rates go to-day this will buy but little space. Sometimes, if a publisher is convinced of the worth of a new author, he will go beyond this figure. But he will rarely continue to advertise extensively unless the book shows early signs of becoming popular. So well established is this principle that it is a common saying in the publishing world, especially when authors are present, that a book is advertised, not to make it succeed, but because it is succeeding. Most publishers will inform the layman that advertising is primarily useful, not for selling books, but for encouraging booksellers and keeping authors from running amuck.

The peculiarities of book advertising are closely bound up with the peculiarities of the book trade. The total amount of advertising may increase, but if the number of titles also greatly increases there may be a decline in the amount of advertising allotted to the average book. Again, there may be an increase in certain media and a decrease in others, an increase in the initial advertising of books and an abrupt decline in the amount given to those particular books immediately thereafter. The year 1929 showed an absolute increase in the country at large over 1928. But an analysis of the figures shows, as a writer in "The Publishers' Weekly" has pointed out, that the increase was in the New York newspapers, and that elsewhere there was what is described as "an alarming decrease." On the other hand, publishers show an increasing disposition to use magazines of national circulation, among which the Sunday book-review sections of

two New York newspapers are by general consent included. According to the authority just quoted, Mr. Charles H. Denhard, "probably twenty per cent of all the money spent to advertise trade books is spent in the [New York] 'Times Book Review.'" There is thus a much greater concentration of book advertising than there used to be. There is, that is to say, a more careful cultivation of a more limited field. The great potentially book-reading public outside the fence is as much neglected as ever.

Book advertising totals over a period of years show rather remarkable fluctuations. Let us take the New York City newspapers between 1917 and November, 1929. We get this result:

1917	1,124,785 lines	1924	1,439,966 lines
1918	846,688	1925	1,498,040
1919	1,344,995	1926	1,771,063
1920	1,205,788	1927	1,896,460
1921	1,177,569	1928	1,823,931
1922	1,676,944	1929 10 mos.	1,613,687
1923	1,809,294		

I have omitted the last two months of 1929 because of the extraneous element introduced by the stock collapse which occurred in October. On the whole, there is a tendency for the amount of book advertising to increase, but the increase cannot be compared for a moment with that in the advertising of automobiles, radio sets, refrigerators, or cosmetics. Whether or not the book trade is on the verge of an advertising expansion similar to that which has overtaken other businesses may still be a question. There are no signs of such a development at this writing. Quite the contrary, in fact. Whether or not the trade could derive sufficient profit from additional and more general advertising to pay the bills is a yet more fundamental question. In specific instances it seems certain that advertising can push a book so far and no farther.

A well-known publicist once wrote a book which was only reasonably popular. It seemed to him that it deserved a much wider sale and that with his skill in influencing public opinion he could procure such a sale. He therefore appropriated two or three thousand dollars from his own ample bank account with which to make the demonstration. He succeeded — within limits. That is, the sales were somewhat increased, but at the cost of several dollars a copy. Another kind of book advertising — the advertising of books as commodities, much as the California fruit-growers advertise oranges or the Oregon ranchers advertise apples — belongs a little farther on in our discussion. Incidentally it is interesting to know that, though books do not seem to be overadvertised, the percentage of the retail price allotted to advertising is larger in the book industry than in most other industries. With the publisher's 10 per cent we may compare the automobile manufacturer's 1 to 3 per cent, the candy manufacturer's 3 to 5 per cent, the grocery trade's 1 to 4 per cent, and the shoe manufacturer's 3 to 5 per cent. The estimates are those of a Los Angeles advertising agency. Only cosmetics, with an appropriation of 8 to 12 per cent, and toilet preparations, for which from 3 to 12 per cent was spent, rivaled the book trade in this respect.

The publishers of the Abbé Dimnet's "The Art of Thinking" not long ago made an attempt to find out why people bought this very successful book. An analysis of 10,000 questionnaire cards produced this very interesting result:

Reviews	3454
Advertising	2460
Recommended by a friend	1219
Reputation of the author	604
Bookstore display	420
Interest in subject	409
Recommended by bookstore	383
Gift	270

Lecture or sermon	230
Title of book	199
Appearance of book	191
Examination of copy in bookstore	180
John Dewey's tribute	161
Circular or catalogue	156
Recommended by professor	64
Rated as best-seller	56

"Publicity," which includes reviews, is more important than advertising, though it is closely linked with advertising. Certainly few book reviews would be published if book publishers did not support literary magazines and departments by purchasing advertising space. One publisher once asked me, ingenuously and I think quite honestly, if a certain book would have a better chance of being reviewed in a certain publication if he advertised it in that publication. I was able to answer him with a positive no, and I am sure that no review medium whose opinions are valued can be influenced in its verdicts or in the extensiveness of its treatment of given books by the use or non-use of its advertising columns. But it would be strange if, with the best intentions and the highest sort of integrity on both sides, publishers who spend handsomely for advertising did not find it easy to secure "publicity" in the organs with which they deal.

A publisher's publicity department is like the similar department of any other business. It is entrusted with the task of arranging the big or little ballyhoo which precedes, accompanies, and follows the launching of any new book upon the market. The publicity man studies his authors and makes note of any and all possible ways of bringing them to the prospective reader's attention. He pesters them for personal information of the most intimate sort, insists upon having their latest photographs, and rejoices in picturesque anecdotes. He provides the raw material for much of the chit-chat of the literary sections, arranges

literary teas, encourages lectures and other conspicuous exploits, and does all he can to make the author a well-known and charming personality in the eyes of the public. "Personality notes" are particularly good material. One publicity director, Miss Mary Mackay, analyzing her results in "The Publishers' Weekly" reported that of a certain batch of notes about authors sent to papers all over the country 131 were printed in as many papers and that 107 of these were used *verbatim*. If an author can manage to swim the Hellespont, be chased by a lion, or do a parachute jump, or even if the fact can be elicited that he is fond of playing marbles, the publicity department of his publishing house rejoices. But publicity, like advertising, is tricky. A few years ago a deposed European statesman visited the United States under circumstances which placed him on the first page of every newspaper for days on end. While in this country he was under an agreement, considered unfair by most champions of free speech, not to give interviews. When, on crossing into Canada, he did speak out, his utterances were broadcast far and wide. The publishers who happened to have in press a book in which he set forth his opinions in full were jubilant. They rushed the book to the stands and announced it with a blast of trumpets — after which it reached a total sale of several hundred copies and vanished before some newer sensation.

So it is clear that neither advertising nor publicity can singly or combined make a book sell, though each is valuable. Favorable reviews in prominent newspapers and magazines are the best stimulus, yet they do not guarantee large sales. Every author, probably, has been impressed by the relative ineffectiveness of the critics. He is glad to have a prominent reviewer advise several hundred thousand people to drop everything and read his book, but if he is wise he does not pay the first installment on a steam yacht

on that account. The influence that sells a book — and upon this point practically every publisher, old and young, conservative or radical, agrees — is "word of mouth." Reader A recommends the volume to Reader B, who passes it on to Reader C, who insists that Reader D peruse it, and so on, up and down the alphabet, in hundreds of key towns and cities, until finally it has become the fashion to read the book in question. Word of mouth is so important that, as one publisher remarked to me, it would be well worth while to give away an entire first edition of any really good book if only the right people could be found and persuaded to accept it and read it. There is no doubt that many successful books are read by thousands who neither like nor understand them, but have been made curious about them. Mr. Sinclair Lewis will probably not commit suicide if I venture the suggestion that this was true of "Main Street." Popular books are read as stunts by those who yearn to "keep up." The cultural value of reading done under such circumstances may be questioned. Its value to the lucky publisher and author is never in doubt.

The processes of publishing and selling, as I have so far outlined them, thus contain large elements of chance. The trends of popular taste are as unpredictable as those of the weather and less predictable than those of the stock market. The range is from the best to very nearly the worst, though the standard has been rising during the past generation. Though he employ the best cost accountants, the most adroit publicity men, the cleverest advertising writers, the publisher in the end comes up against a wholly incalculable element. He may know that the public will buy about so many books in a given year, just as he knows that it will buy about so many cigarettes or so many cakes of soap, but neither he nor any one else knows even vaguely how many copies of a given book it can be made to buy.

The general publisher's outlet, as I have said, is mainly through the bookstores. His business rests upon the bookstore system, with all its virtues and all its defects. A few publishers maintain bookstores of their own — though necessarily they can hardly hope to dispose of a large percentage of their entire output in this fashion. But why do not publishers eliminate the bookstore, advertise widely in journals of general circulation and sell by mail? The answer is, of course, that some of them do and are known in consequence as mail-order publishers. Furthermore, every publisher maintains a mail-order department, large or small, sends out catalogues and circulars, and indicates in his advertisements that books may be ordered direct. The general catalogue of one of the largest of the American publishing firms lists every book that is still in stock and contains 481 double-column, closely printed pages. The general catalogue is supplemented by seasonal catalogues, which any one may have on application. Usually both catalogues and advertising contain the phrase, "Order from your bookseller or direct from the publisher." This practice hints at one of the reasons why general publishers do not push their mail-order business. The bookseller is extremely sensitive to any trespassing on his preserves. He does not consider it ethical for the publisher to compete with him for the same set of customers. And though the bookshop, as it exists, is by no means a perfect device for selling books, it is so important that the publisher cannot afford to hurt its proprietor's feelings.

Moreover, direct mail selling is so highly specialized that general publishers do not find much profit in it. It demands an especial kind of book, not a novel, which must have a potential appeal to a large audience, and which can be moved by high-pressure advertising. In the field of general publishing its value is mainly as a builder of goodwill. It may seem at first a little strange that it has not

proved more useful in distributing books in those vast areas of the United States where there are no bookstores and few libraries. No matter how remote one may be from the centers of population, it is possible to procure by mail or express any book of any publisher. One obstruction is the high postage rates on books. It is now possible for the publishers of "The Saturday Evening Post" to send an average copy of their often very valuable magazine from Philadelphia to San Francisco for about one cent. A book of the same weight cannot be mailed for less than sixteen cents. But the real trouble with direct mail selling by general book publishers is that there is no real selling pressure behind it, and without prohibitive expense cannot be any. Except for the bare necessities of life, few commodities, under present-day conditions, are *bought*. On the contrary, they are *sold*. And the general publisher's advertisements and catalogues cannot economically be made to sell.

When he has sold all the copies of a particular book at the standard price that the market will absorb, the publisher is confronted with the final stage of his merchandising problem, that of moving his surplus stock at what he can get for it — or "remaindering." If the book has been reasonably successful, he may dispose of his sheets, his bound volumes, or, more often, his plates, to a house specializing in reprints. There are a number of such houses, and we shall see in a later chapter that they are important and significant.

Even though a book has done very well indeed, its market may suddenly disappear and leave the publisher with many unsold copies on his hands. If a book has not done as well as was expected — and few books do — the situation is far more serious. Indeed, much of the profit of a publishing house may depend upon the foresight it displays in adapting the size of its editions to the size of

the public for each given book. Unsold books may easily eat up all the gains on those that have been sold. Some publishers try to avoid this contingency by beginning with small editions. The trouble with this practice is that, if the book does begin to catch on, there may be delay in getting out additional copies and this delay may be fatal to the book's chances. In the book trade opportunity pauses but briefly and its forelock is difficult to grasp.

But when he is definitely left with unsold and perhaps unsalable books in his warehouse, the publisher must do the best he can with the wreckage. If the books in question are of a sort which may have a slow but steady sale through several seasons — and this is the case with many biographies, works in the field of science, history and philosophy, and other solid and worth-while volumes — he does not worry. If the books are fiction, he may be willing to keep a certain quantity in stock in the hope that a future novel by the same author will be successful enough to cause a demand for the previous one. In most cases, however, the publisher will get back as much of his investment as he can by selling to a remainder-bookseller, receiving, if he is lucky, perhaps fifteen or twenty cents for a book meant to retail for $2.50, and a correspondingly larger sum for more expensive books. This is the source from which come many of the books displayed in second-hand stores and in the "publishers' remainder sales" which are frequent in our larger cities, especially around Christmas time. As a last resort the publisher may decide to "pulp" the books — that is, to sell them for their value as waste paper. Then they may eventually reappear as book or magazine stock, to be the raw material for some more successful author's work. The publisher may keep the plates a little longer, but in time he will resell them to the author for what they cost him, or, if the author cannot afford to buy them, will melt them down. Such is the fate of many an ambitious

literary effort. The Davy Jones's locker of the publishing business is alive with wreckage — some stately and beautiful ships among the rest.

If similar conditions prevailed in any other business there would be, and justly, wide discontent and much searching of heart. This is true of the publishing business, though the ailment has long been chronic and publishers are as accustomed to it as old men to their rheumatism. The only solution, indeed, would be such a broadening of the market for books that any book of any worth would find at least enough readers to pay for its plates. So we find that in so far as the book trade has been organized this has been its effort. But organizations of publishers and booksellers cannot go beyond the principles followed by their individual members. At best — and a good best it is in this case — they can merely do collectively certain things that cannot be done as well individually. One of these things is the promotion of book-reading as a national habit. Another is the gathering of information useful to booksellers and the encouragement of new outlets. Both of these measures have been adopted by the National Association of Book Publishers, which has striven for some years to broaden the retail book market.

The National Association, as its secretary, Miss Marion Humble, has put it, "conducted its first successful co-operative publicity campaign, in co-operation with the American Booksellers' Association, the American Library Association, the Boy Scouts of America, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs," in 1919. During the war, as Miss Humble points out, thousands of soldiers "who had never before been 'exposed' to books were given the resources of the best equipped libraries, with a complete stock, not only of recreational books, but also of biography, travel, and practical books of information." This was the work of the American Library Association. It was natural

that many of these men, returning to their homes and peace-time occupations, should carry with them the newly acquired taste for book-reading. The Publishers' Association looked beyond this to the fertile field of children's reading. If children could be taught to want good books at an early age, they would still want good books when they grew up. Out of this conviction came the first "Children's Book Week," and out of the "Children's Book Week," which before long became an adults' book week as well, came, in 1920, the "Year-Round Book Promotion Plan."

This plan, supported by nearly all the general publishers and by many of the textbook, technical, and scientific book publishers, as well as the university presses, has been pushed with great energy and success. No phase of useful publicity has been neglected. "Artistic book posters, pamphlets on building up the home library, on books and good citizenship, on books for vacation reading, on books as gifts for all occasions, and programmes for year-round promotion of reading," have been distributed by the thousand wherever they would do the most good. Book lists for special purposes have been prepared. Material has been placed in more than a thousand libraries. Not only the American Library Association, but the United States Bureau of Education, the Councils of Churches, the Sunday-School Associations, and many other organizations have co-operated, at least to the extent of using the promotion material or the book lists. For direct propaganda in the field the Association has employed lecturers. One of these, in nine months of a single year, lectured in 21 states, 149 cities, 21 colleges, 174 high schools, 174 bookstores, and 82 libraries, speaking in all to 134,071 people. Most of this work was carried on in communities of less than 10,000 people, where the facilities for getting books are scantiest.

That the effect of these campaigns and of the promotion of new outlets has been great, no one will for a moment deny. They have been conducted with the utmost intelligence, enthusiasm, and devotion to the common good. They have produced an evolutionary growth, proportional to the existing size of the book market. They could not, of course, call into existence a Henry Ford to transform the making and selling of books — and perhaps lay down five hundred books on every American center table. That transcendent genius, when and if he appears, will not function as a member of an association.

CHAPTER V

THE JOBBER AND HIS JOB

One could count the important American book jobbers on the fingers of one hand and still have a finger or so left. Nevertheless, the jobber is a significant factor in book distribution, and an essential one as such distribution is now carried on. Three fourths of the booksellers of the country, it is said, buy more or less of their stock from him. He is necessary to them because he can bunch small orders of different books of different publishers and send them in one package and on one bill with the least possible delay. He is useful to the larger publishers because he saves them the expense of handling small orders. He is almost indispensable to the smaller publishers because to a large extent he takes the place of the costly selling force they cannot afford to maintain. And he rewards himself for these services, like jobbers in other lines, by exacting adequate discounts. As almost all his sales are to retailers, even though he himself may have a retail counter in his office and do a certain amount of direct mail selling to the ultimate consumer, he must bill most of his goods at the usual publishers' discounts. His profit, therefore, lies in the relatively narrow margin between this regular discount and the extra pennies he can squeeze out by quantity buying. The high range of this discount is from 46 to 51 per cent of the retail price, or from 5 to 10 points above the discount allowed by the publisher to the average bookseller. At a guess the jobber may have an extra 20 or 25 cents to pay him for handling the usual $2.50 book, and proportionately more when he handles the higher-priced volumes.

The jobber must handle all books of all publishers, which is more than even the largest bookstore in the country can do. He must have those books in stock, so that they can be sent out instantly when an order comes in. New York's largest jobber, who is also the largest in the country, usually has in his stacks from 60,000 to 70,000 *titles*. Since approximately 10,000 titles are published in an active year, this represents the accumulation of several years — of more than six or seven years, since a great number of books are like mankind as seen by the psalmist, here to-day and gone to-morrow. The jobber must have available thousands of titles which move slowly and have a long life. As such titles are often the more serious and meaningful portion of our literature, the jobber is a necessary prop to the best sort of books, though he must and does handle every sort.

His buying problem resembles that of the retail bookseller, for, though he must handle every title for which there may conceivably be a demand, he still has to decide how many copies of each of a year's thousands of titles he will buy. Sometimes he gets around this difficulty by buying on consignment, in which case he can dump back into the publisher's yawning warehouse — and publishers' warehouses often have good reason to yawn — such stock as he cannot dispose of. But usually he must take his chances and buy outright. It is apparent, therefore, that though he does not parade with trumpet and drums, like the book clubs, he must have a powerful influence upon the success of a book. Particularly is this true of a book put out by a small publisher. His order may range from five copies of a given title to as many as twenty-five thousand copies.

Through long and often sad experience [says Francis Ludlow, in "The Building of a Book"] he knows in a general way what books will sell well, though no one can be absolutely sure

of the bookbuying public. By studying the market, the past records of the author, the special features of the book, the advertising to be given it, and trade conditions generally, the wholesaler arrives at an approximation of the number of copies he can probably sell in a few months' time. Sometimes, however, he has to overbuy deliberately in order to get a satisfactory discount, or to render a special service to the publishers or to the retail booksellers. To help establish a new author he will occasionally "plunge" on a book and do his best to make that book a success. And to help his customers he frequently stocks books upon which there is no profit, or perhaps even a loss, for he must carry the books of all publishers, regardless of his own profit on individual titles.

But though the jobber may stock some books on which there is little or no profit, he remains in business and lays up a few dollars for his old age by pushing books which can be sold advantageously. He is far more strictly a business man than is the publisher, for he does not handle a book because of the prestige that attaches to it or because he preens himself upon being a cultural missionary. He is not sought after by authors. Nobody expects him to give literary teas. One of the most successful and highly esteemed book jobbers in America likes to startle people by declaring that he knows nothing about literature. His business, he says, is for him as purely a business as it would be if he were handling dry goods or hardware. Perhaps this attitude is not altogether consoling to the author who thinks he is being neglected or to the publisher who handles such an author's books. It might even be called materialistic. But if author or publisher desires returns in the shape of bread and butter, or the equivalent, he naturally brings the materialistic factor into play at some stage of the transaction. To try to make money by selling good books is possibly just as materialistic as trying to make money by selling bad books. The idealism, if any, lies in

the making, not the selling. It is certainly not the jobber's business to improve the popular taste. He must take what he can get in the way of literary commodities and dispose of them as profitably as possible. If the public taste goes down, he must follow it down. If it goes up, he must follow it up.

The selection of book lists is one of the major activities in the whole field of literature, whether carried on for cultural or for commercial purposes. A good book list is almost as creative a job as a good book. Lists are absolutely necessary if the reader or bookseller is to be able to see the wood in spite of the trees. The jobber, too, gets out lists in the most profuse fashion. These lists, which include books which are expected to sell well rather than those which perhaps ought to sell well, are invaluable as realistic pictures of national tastes. They have to be reliable, for the bookseller depends upon them to guide him in his buying.

The jobber often goes beyond the mere furnishing of lists. In the case of a new bookstore he is often entrusted with the selection of the stock with which the store will open. Here, as one jobber puts it, "he must exercise care that the newcomer does not permit his personal preferences in the choice of books to outweigh considerations of salability and profit." The jobber stands ready, too, to give advice as to the equipment of the new store, to cooperate in the advertising and promotion, and even to show the beginning bookseller how to keep his accounts. At least one jobbing firm has a standing order system by which it sends out at regular intervals its own choices of the best-selling new books. This same firm has a renting library department which tells those who are about to venture into this field "what are their chances of success, how much capital they should have, how many books — and just what titles — will be enough for a beginning, how many new

books to add each week, how to keep records, what fees to charge," and so on. The firm also makes it a policy to help develop new outlets whenever and wherever it believes they can be made to pay. It maintains a special card index of all its customers, separate from its regular bookkeeping cards, and investigates whenever in a given case business seems to be falling off. In short, it is midwife, nurse, and foster parent to many a bookstore and book outlet. And all this is good business, not altruism. The jobber is not selling books; he is, in the business man's stale but serviceable phrase, "selling service."

Once a month the jobbers I have been quoting bring together their accumulated information in a critical summary of new and forthcoming publications — "critical," not from the high academic altitudes, but from the humble level of the cash register. This is accompanied by discussions of bookselling methods and problems, of book-market trends, and of general market conditions. In brief, it is easy to give the jobber credit for being an extremely useful link in the chain which includes the large and small publisher, the bookstores and the libraries. In his resourcefulness and aggressiveness he seems to belong to the new business day, though the larger part of his dealings is with retailers who are still within the frame of the traditional bookselling system. Whether he is capable of taking part in a large-scale extension of the book market is doubtful. His constituency, by and large, is that of the old-line publishers. He rarely ventures into untrodden fields. He is fairly well satisfied with the book business as it is — or would be if he were only sure it would remain about as it is. Of course I am not speaking of any specific jobber when I say this.

One jobber of long experience in a city not New York confesses that his business has fallen off considerably in late years, and attributes this decline to the fact that the

news companies "skim the cream" — that is to say, buy and push the best-selling books without bothering to handle the more modest titles. This jobber some years ago bought and sold ten per cent of America's general trade books; now the proportion is nearer five per cent. Of course this does not represent a fifty per cent drop in his book business, for the number of volumes published has greatly increased. The figure means only that he has not been able to keep up with the growth of the trade. Once this firm's buyer would order from $20,000 to $25,000 worth of books during a single visit to a single Eastern publisher; now he thinks he is enterprising if he orders $5000 worth. The firm prospers, but this is because it sells other things than books — stationery is an important and profitable item.

The experience is not necessarily typical. However, it allows the news companies to make their bow in the rôle of large-scale handlers of books — many of them "serious" books, though all of them must be potentially popular. The largest and best-known of the news companies, the American, took its modest first steps in 1864, while the Civil War was at its height. Primarily it was organized to distribute magazines. Yet it foreshadowed its subsequent interest in books during the first year of its existence, when it began to handle Beadle's famous line of dime novels — once read by wide-eyed boys behind the barn, now regarded by connoisseurs as priceless relics of an earlier and simpler day in our national history and even reprinted for the delectation of modern readers. I happen to remember a bicycle repair shop in a small Vermont town, just after the end of the last century, in which books of this lineage were on sale as a side line. "Old Sleuth" was among them. But times changed and news companies grew and changed with them.

The sample catalogue of the American News Com-

pany which I have on my desk as this is written is about the size of the ordinary flat magazine, weighs a little less than three pounds, and contains 388 pages, all devoted to books. A few years ago, it is quite possible, the activities of this company would have had but a small place in a discussion of the distribution of "serious" books. Its dealings were largely with retailers other than the regular booksellers. The books sold by these retailers, usually as part of a miscellaneous stock, or retailed by train boys to divert bored passengers, were not necessarily bad books. They merely were not of the sort which keeps literary critics awake nights. Even the dime novel probably did no one any harm, though anxious parents, not then having the motion pictures to worry about, used to believe it did. The trade was aimed at a different class of customers from that which patronized the regular bookstores. To a large extent it still is, very fortunately, I believe. For the bookbuyer who never goes into a bookstore is not only becoming more numerous, but is demanding a different and better sort of book.

Just how rapidly his tastes have been improving cannot be judged by the catalogue I have just mentioned, for the news company sells to the regular bookstores and to the public libraries as well as to stationery-stores, cigar-stores, candy-stores, and news-stands. But since its outlets are to be counted by the thousands and even tens of thousands, whereas bookstores can be numbered by hundreds, the fact that Beadle has been replaced by a list including, among much merchandisable trash, such writers as Katherine Anthony, John Dewey, Zona Gale, Frank Swinnerton, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis, James Branch Cabell, and John Erskine — to select eminent names at random — has no little significance. The house organ of the American News Company was being sent to more than seventy thousand addresses — all

supposedly regular or occasional customers — when this paragraph was written. Book sales had increased with great rapidity during the past five years and showed signs of further growth. An increasing number of sales were being made to rental libraries — we shall touch upon them later — and New York's best-known rental library chain was the company's largest single customer. The company in its publicity was tying up the selling of reading matter with the selling of other goods and the selling of books with the sale of other reading matter. "Books *are* reading matter," it pointed out. "Magazines are reading matter and like begets like. So book customers become magazine-readers, and magazine-buyers, while magazine-readers become book-converts." If exposure to books — to *any* books — is a good thing, the company is doing useful missionary work.

This organization and its subsidiaries have at this writing about one hundred and fifty distributing points well scattered over the United States. Publishers' salesmen commonly call at each one of these points, convince the resident manager of the value of their goods for his particular clientèle, then arrange for the delivery of the books to the central office in New York City, whence they are shipped to their several destinations. The economy of the method is apparent. To what extent the charge of "skimming the cream" is well founded is hard to determine. The local news agencies are naturally under no compulsion to carry a complete stock of titles, for they could not sell them if they did. Nevertheless, the variety of the books they do carry is certainly increasing. Perhaps this is only another way of saying that there are more "best-sellers" than there used to be. Not only are there more best-selling novels, but biography, history, and science have been added to the list. This is part of the encouraging evidence that better books are being read by more people — which, of course, is

far from saying that enough good books are being read by enough people.

The work of the jobbers and especially of the news companies is chiefly significant in that it consists of an attempt, made along business lines, for profit, to expand the book market. Very little sentiment is involved in this effort, although some of those engaged in it may well take pride in its indirect results. The old gentlemanly traditions of bookselling cut little figure here. Books are being treated as commodities.

I think we are entitled to be optimistic about the situation. The endowment of reading is a magnificent enterprise and apparently a necessary one. There ought to be more of it, and there will be. The public library is no "demonstration" which, by succeeding, will make itself less necessary. But libraries alone are not enough. Not until their efforts and those of other educational institutions have borne fruit in a public which demands good books as effectively as it now demands good automobiles, good candy, and good cosmetics will America be "book-conscious." And some signs of a dawning of book-consciousness do appear in the growth of the business of those thorough business men, the book middlemen.

CHAPTER VI

SPECIAL WAYS OF SELLING BOOKS

THE subscription method is the oldest way of selling books in printed form, since it arose at a time when there was no general book market and a special market had to be created in advance of the publication of each book. It was at first customary to collect at least part of the subscription money in advance of publication, then use it to pay printers and binders. Successive installments were often paid as volumes or parts were completed and delivered. Subscribers were likely to be genteel persons who may have been interested in the books, but were perhaps more interested in being known as patrons of literature.

As more and more of the public became literate, the market widened and the gentility diminished, until finally the subscription book was simply one method of forcing the sales of a book already published. At first, and indeed until a comparatively recent period, it was not thought that the book-buyer could be trusted to pay his bills and agents were employed to make the collections as they fell due. This elaborate organization made subscription books hideously expensive. They still are expensive compared with trade books sold over the counter, for the simple reason, as one subscription-book publisher put it, that the customer has to pay not only for the book but for being persuaded to buy it.

The first subscription books sold in America, according to Mr. O'Hara, whose excellent monograph I have already quoted, were "usually Bibles, religious tracts, Fox's 'Book of Martyrs,' and Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress.' "

The book agent [Mr. O'Hara continues] was frequently the first agency of education to come to a remote and scattered population. The subscription method of selling was necessary if the people were to read books, for bookstores were often hundreds of miles distant. The early book agent, therefore, should be considered in the same way as the minister and teacher. He was the pioneer of literature and science. It was the later extension of the agency system that brought both book agents and subscription books into disfavor. Many noted American men acted as book agents during their young manhood. George Washington canvassed for "The American Savage; How He May Be Tamed by the Weapons of Civilization." He sold two hundred copies in and around Alexandria, Virginia. Jay Gould sold books, as did also Mark Twain, H. W. Longfellow, and F. B. Collier. Daniel Webster paid his second term's tuition at Dartmouth by acting as local agent in Merrimac County, New Hampshire, for De Tocqueville's "America." Bret Harte was a book agent for one year. After his resignation from the army General Grant became a general agent of Putnam's to dispose of Irving's "Columbus." Rutherford B. Hayes canvassed Southern Ohio for Baxter's "Lives of the Saints." James G. Blaine was once a canvasser for a book called "Life of Henry Clay, the Mill Boy of the Slashes."

Unfortunately, it was soon discovered that not only good books but almost any books could be sold by the subscription method. Then came the era of the aggressive and almost truculent book agent, still remembered by many middle-aged persons. This individual's business, as he saw it, was to break down sales resistance by any method that was not positively illegal. He had not only a glittering eye and a well-oiled tongue which pivoted in the middle, but a large and heavy foot which he was ready to wedge into any doorway opened far enough to permit it. Sometimes he disguised himself by slinging his samples from a harness under his coat, whence they could be produced when it was too late for the "prospect" to retreat.

The book agent of this type unloaded as much of his merchandise as he could, regardless of its fitness or unfitness to the purchaser's needs. He was by inclination and necessity a wanderer, bent on taking quick profits and moving on. He preyed on ignorance, selling flashy, poorly printed, poorly bound volumes of standard works at three or four times what they could be bought for through the regular book trade, and sometimes handling also books no reputable publisher would think of issuing and no decent bookseller dream of putting on his shelves.

The varieties of books thus sold were numerous. They ranged, to quote Mr. O'Hara again, all the way from "books of moral conduct, treatises of life among the Mormons, life in the convents, etiquette, how to get and keep a husband (or a wife), royal road to happiness," and so on, to "art books, encyclopedias . . . religious, scientific, and medical works, cook books, legal advisers, social and business forms, biographies, histories, war books, travels, wit and humor, and dictionaries." A Cleveland man, who, strange to say, was named Barnum, was one of the most famous of old-time book agents. He is said to have trained or supervised more than twenty-five thousand bookselling pests.

Refinement crept into the "book-agent game" — or, as we should be more inclined to say at the present day, "racket" — as the sophistication of the once simple-minded "prospect" increased. "By the year 1901," says Mr. O'Hara, "the new type of book agent could be described as one who was well dressed, carried his stock in a suitcase (or showed only a prospectus), was above the average in education, and whose earnings varied from $3000 to $12,000 a year. A more conservative estimate in 1912 was $4000 to $5000 a year for the really good agents and $2000 to $4000 for the others." So dawned the modern era of sweetness and light. Though the book agent, like

his brother the life insurance agent, has remained a standing butt of jokes, he has acquired a dignity, a reliability, and a genuine usefulness undreamed of in the old days. Some companies have entirely discontinued the employment of college boys or other temporary canvassers and try to induce their agents to make selling books a permanent profession. Strenuous and fairly successful efforts have been made to weed out the unscrupulous adventurers who were in the habit of extracting large advances from gullible publishers and then flitting on to other employment.

The modern subscription-book business, like its sister, the mail-order business, comes nearer the standardization and "efficiency" of American business in general than do other branches of the book trade. Its sales of a given title are carefully calculated in advance, its selection of titles is carefully made with reference to known sales of previous and similar titles, and its sales forces are drilled and supervised. Its methods are those used in the direct selling of other commodities. So reliable have these methods become that, as one experienced seller of subscription books (Charles S. Olcott, of Houghton Mifflin Company, in "The Building of a Book") says, "one house which carefully scrutinizes its orders has suffered losses of less than one per cent on a business of several millions of dollars covering a period of over thirty years." Another house, which built up its business around a great national magazine, allows about five per cent for losses due to the failure of customers to pay their bills. Losses of most subscription houses from this source would probably fall under five per cent, depending on the nature of the communities canvassed and the kind of books sold.

One such house carries 100,000 open book accounts. Its sales territory is carefully mapped, some communities are blocked off as "closed towns," and as a rule it does not try to sell in towns of less than 5000 population. Its collection

force — for it still employs field collectors — is entirely separate from its sales force, and its average term of credit is fifteen months. It is as I write doing a gross business of about $10,000,000, and so rapidly is this business growing that it expects to expand to $25,000,000 a year within the next half decade. Most of its sales have been and are in sets, and ordinarily it will not handle a set of which it is not sure of selling at least 5000 a year. Sales of some of its sets range up to 20,000 a year, and its salesmen make from $8000 to $10,000 in many instances, with managers earning as much as $50,000 a year.

Another well-known subscription-book firm tried for years to work out a method of selling its product through the bookstores. This would have netted it a larger profit than was left after the agent's customary commission of twenty-five per cent had been paid and the expenses of expressing, collecting, and general sales overhead added. The attempt failed, probably because the books, though of a high grade, were slow-moving, and the bookstores found it paid them better to handle the seasonal books of general publishers. Moreover, almost any subscription publisher is a suspicious character in the eye of the retail bookseller, with whom he directly competes. This is not the case, parenthetically, with certain general publishers who sell by subscription sets of books which the booksellers are content not to bother with.

The firm just mentioned sells many children's books. These are usually handled by women agents, who go into a town, with or without an advance study of the field, become acquainted with the "key" people — clergymen, teachers, officials of women's clubs — secure their endorsements if possible, and then use these endorsements as sales arguments for the average parent. A service department is maintained through which purchasers of books can secure needed information and advice. The policy, based on long

experience, is to concentrate on one book or set at a time. Some sets are sold to jobbers, who in turn resell them through their own agents. But these middlemen are gradually going out of existence — just why seems a little uncertain. Perhaps they lack the enthusiasm which a publisher naturally feels for his own book and can impart to his own agents. Obsolete or obsolescent, also, is the practice of selling books outright to individual agents, leaving them to dispose of them and get their money back as best they can.

Probably the most dignified subscription business is that which is carried on as a department of a general publishing enterprise. A typical department of this kind owes its existence to the fact that the publishers found themselves with a large number of sets of standard authors on hand which they could not sell through the regular bookstore channels. The booksellers were willing enough, but sales were infrequent and shelf-room expensive. The publishers, therefore, organized a subscription-book or rather "private-library" department, which has flourished ever since. Its agents are for the most part permanent employees, covering the same territory year after year and earning good incomes. As they visit and revisit the same customers, their success depends, not upon the sale of a particular set at a given time, but upon giving the customer satisfaction — building up, in short, a fund of "good-will" for themselves and their company. If they are fitted for their work, their customers become their friends, they are welcomed whenever they call, and their lives are far from unpleasant. Their relations with purchasers are, sometimes, like those of an old-time bookseller, the difference being that they go to their customers instead of waiting for the customers to come to them. Usually they hold out the ideal of a well-rounded library, suited both to the purchaser's tastes and to his income. Being good business

men they make a practice of calling before a client has "paid out" on one contract and inducing him to sign up for another. Their books are well-printed, bound, and illustrated, and are usually of a kind which could not easily be obtained in any other way. All this may seem a little quaint in this stage of automobiles and radios. Nevertheless, enough persons can still be found who like to sit by the fire and read on winter evenings to make the enterprise a prosperous one.

Another subscription department of a well-known publishing house operates in a similar way, with perhaps more emphasis on modern authors and books of information. It also handles fine editions of from 750 to 1000 copies, printed from type and numbered, at prices to correspond. As a rule it finds that it cannot profitably publish subscription books at low prices. Roosevelt's "African Game Trails," sold for $3.75, was far below the usual minimum. Agents in the field do not like to handle sets for less than $30 apiece. When their unit sales are $30 or more, they do not find it hard to earn $50 a week and some of them make $300 or more. One star salesman has a drawing account of $300 a week and makes several thousand dollars a year in addition. No house-to-house canvasses are made. Instead the salesmen procure the names of leading citizens, known to be interested in books, and canvass them. By this method there is little loss of time, and it has been found worth while to canvass in towns of from two to three thousand population, or even less. Until about five years ago the firm employed collectors. Now all its collections are made by mail, with no more than the normal losses.

The head of this firm's subscription department is convinced that subscription selling is a species of missionary work, making sales in the end for the bookstores. Like many other subscription-book salesmen he likes to compare

his business with that of life insurance. Relatively few persons, he points out, would buy life insurance if they were not pestered by the agents. In the same way there are large numbers of potential readers who will not buy good books unless the habit is fairly forced upon them. This is particularly true if they live in towns without adequate libraries or bookstores. If the cheese is placed before them, however, they will nibble, and having nibbled will like the taste.

An example of the type of book or set which could not be sold in large numbers if it were not handled by subscription is the encyclopedia or other work of reference. The "Britannica" is an outstanding illustration of this kind of exploitation. By means of an extensive campaign of advertising, followed up by circularization and direct canvassing, this encyclopedia has greatly enlarged its sales. Other encyclopedias have done the same thing, reaching many thousands of purchasers who would never order such a set of books from a bookstore and who probably would never order it at all if they had to pay cash on delivery. The encyclopedia is an instance of a distinct trend in the subscription-book trade toward works of solid information. Although not all subscription-book publishers will admit it there seems to be a swing away from the old-fashioned cultural "set." Perhaps the standard authors are losing their hold somewhat. But people are more eager than ever for information and advice, and books which offer these commodities still find a large market. One familiar compendium has sold half a million sets, at prices ranging from $60 to $160 each, during a twenty-year period. The "International Library of Music," first published under the title of "The World's Best Music," sold about 250,000 sets between 1896 and 1930. The great "Dictionary of American Biography," now in process of publication, could probably not have been published at all had

it not been for the machinery of a well-organized subscription-book department.

But though subscription books have acquired a dignity they did not formerly possess, there still remains a wide range of quality as well as a considerable range in the integrity of the publishers. I am not thinking of particular publishers as I write this, though it is not hard to think of books which might serve as illustrations of my point. The "Demi-Monde of Bookdom," as it has aptly been called, makes profitable use of the subscription method. Then there are the hastily compiled books which follow in the wake of disasters, wars, and other notable events; reissues of histories and reference books long out of date; and various kinds of "anthologies" — slapped together, cheaply printed, and perhaps of less value to the reader than an equal number of pounds of wood-pulp magazines — or, for that matter, an equal number of pounds of butter. The virtues of books of this sort are likely to be all on the outside.

Even for librarians, trained in judging literature, subscription books present a knotty problem.

> Books sold in this way [writes Dr. Arthur E. Bostwick in "The American Public Library"] may be roughly divided into two classes — those that are too costly to be disposed of through the ordinary channels of trade, and those that are inferior in some way or priced higher than they ought to be, so that they cannot be sold in any way except through personal solicitation. In the first class are included expensive art books, editions de luxe, good sets in costly bindings, etc., most of which are not needed by any library, although some are adapted for the larger institutions. The only works in this class that may be considered by the smaller libraries are certain reference works, such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, that are not issued otherwise than by subscription. . . . The second class of subscription books includes innumerable "sets," formed by re-

printing standard works that may be classed together in some way, often with a well-known name as that of editor, and brief copyrighted introductions; worthless reprints of out-of-date reference books, with scanty up-to-date additions; and books of little value, compiled with a view to attracting a particular class of purchasers, as those of some one religious denomination, veterans of the Civil War, or mechanics unfamiliar with their own trade literature.

I quote this passage because, though it is addressed to librarians, it is an excellent summing-up of the subscription-book situation. The discrimination which is difficult for librarians is impossible for the ordinary person who is not accustomed to buying books on his own initiative. He may, indeed, feel safe if he buys only from well-known and reputable publishers. But if he has sufficient knowledge to do this, he probably has enough interest in the subject to select his own library without help from the insistent canvasser. For this and other reasons it seems certain that the subscription method, though it undoubtedly reaches many thousands of readers who would not otherwise be bookbuyers, offers no device by which the book market may be radically expanded. "The business is improving rather than growing," said one publisher whose own list is a notably good one. The evidence is that the sale of worthwhile books by subscription has about reached its limits.

Closely related to the subscription-book business, and indeed overlapping it, is the mail-order book business. As we have seen, practically all publishers are ready to accept direct mail orders, though they may not make much on such transactions and have to be very careful not to offend the booksellers. Toward the specialized mail-order houses the bookseller feels about as friendly as the average small-town merchant does toward the chain store. But there is as wide a range of quality among mail-order books as among those distributed in any other way. The book clubs, of

which I shall treat in the next chapter, are really mail-order houses operating in a special fashion.

A New York bookman has an enterprise — the only one of its precise kind, so far as I know — which has certain points of similarity with the book clubs. The basis of his enterprise is a catalogue of about fifty thousand carefully selected names from all parts of the country. These are indexed on cards and each individual's preferences and buying habits are in time clearly indicated thereon. The emphasis in the selection of books for distribution is upon solid informative or philosophical volumes. The books are handled by mail, at the regular retail price, so that the advantage to the customer consists entirely in the intelligent guidance given him. Usually a given volume is recommended to about ten thousand clients, of whom perhaps no more than four hundred will purchase it. There is a "special approval service," with the return privilege. If a client fails to purchase a reasonable number of books, it is assumed that he no longer has sufficient confidence in the editor's judgment and his name is dropped from the list. If he orders and returns many books, he is also dropped, for the manager of the service does not believe in "free rides."

This, of course, is the aristocracy of bookbuying. The manager is convinced that fifty thousand names include about all those Americans who are interested in serious and difficult reading — at least so far as those names can be secured for a list. He has certainly shown how a limited but very influential group of readers can be reached, at a profit and with cultural results which ought to be good. The defects of his system are inherent in its virtues, for it demands at its head a man who is not only beyond the ordinary commercial baits, but who is a sound critic of life and literature. And it brings us no nearer the masses who spend so much more on chewing-gum and cigarettes than they do on books. Perhaps those masses come nearer be-

ing represented in the twenty-one thousand accounts which the two-year-old retail mail-order department of the American News Company had when this was written. The number will doubtless be greater before these words are in print.

More typical of the mail-order business in general is the case of a certain publisher who began a few years ago with a capital of several hundred dollars and credit based upon his successful record as head of a mail-order business owned by some one else. His first book was a one-volume Shakespeare, which he advertised lavishly and sold for $5.45. He was immediately successful, other books followed, and to-day he has reduced his price to $2.98 and has tripled his sales. It may seem strange that the two cents' difference between $3 and $2.98 should make a difference in sales, but, as many department-store managers have found, it does. Most of this man's material is free of copyright restrictions, though he sometimes pays royalties just the same. His best-sellers have been Maupassant, Dumas, Tolstoy, and Hugo, followed closely by Kipling, Balzac, Poe, and Conan Doyle. One of his spectacular achievements was a Bible bound in wood from trees on the Mount of Olives. His customers numbered two hundred thousand when these lines were written, and many of them repeated their orders. Getting a good list of prospects was one of the publisher's first steps and adding to it is one of his main concerns. Sometimes he buys mailing lists and circularizes them. Meanwhile he advertises extensively and differs flatly from most regular trade publishers in declaring that "Advertising sells our books — they wouldn't move an inch without advertising."

Each book is advertised separately and sold separately, and though some books are sold to subscription houses the publisher himself uses no agents. This means that his advertising copy must be persuasive, for with the circulars

he sends out it must do the whole work of convincing the prospective customer. It is carefully placed, usually in magazines which have large urban circulations. The rural population, which as we shall find is conspicuously understocked with books, has not proved a profitable field. Indeed, this publisher obtained almost no results from advertisments inserted in farm periodicals and other magazines with a large rural circulation.

The books are sent by mail, and the postage is paid by the subscriber — a fact which under the existing illogical postal system discourages remote purchasers. This difficulty is lessened though not removed by the fact that the books are printed, warehoused, and shipped in a factory centrally located in Indiana. The customer receives the book on approval, may keep it a week, and is then expected either to return it or to send the proper payment. The losses through dishonesty are a little heavier than in the subscription business — about ten per cent of all sales as contrasted with five per cent or less. In the case of the Bible with the olive-wood binding the losses ran to twenty-five per cent — a fact which the publisher mentions without venturing to explain.

As the books are identical in paper, type, and binding, and as even the paging generally runs to about one thousand, the processes of manufacture can be standardized, and as the books do not go out of date they can be made at the most economical times. The result is that costs are kept low. Usually a sale of at least five thousand is necessary in order to pay for the plates. After that a run of twenty-five hundred at a time is economical. Each book starts, of course, with a fund of good-will because of the very fact that it is a standard work. If there is any doubt on this score the publisher may send out two or three thousand circulars in advance of publication to ascertain what the popular response to his offering will be. So far he has

never lost money on any book, and his business for the year of which I am writing is between $800,000 and $1,000,000. Naturally he is a firm believer in the mail-order method. If there is a slump in mail-order bookbuying or in the mail-order business in general — as there now is — he is convinced that it is due to lack of ingenuity on the part of the mail-order houses. The mail-order business, as he sees it, demands a constant flow of new ideas. Its advertising is placed in the same media year after year, and the reading public demands novelty in advertising as well as in fiction and articles. Of course this means that there is a saturation point in the mail-order business, and that this saturation point is relatively soon reached. Even the exploits of Mr. Haldeman-Julius, which I shall take up later on, seem to indicate that.

I may contrast the publisher of whom I have just spoken with another with whom he is in friendly disagreement on most points. This second publisher, having had a long experience with the book mail-order business, is convinced that it is rapidly becoming obsolete. As he looks at it the future lies with more direct methods of sale — perhaps through the enormously increased number of outlets provided by the chain stores and similar retail establishments. He points out that customers like to browse and to handle books before they buy them, and that it is much easier to select from a row of books on a shelf or a pile of books on a table, while one is making other purchases in the same store, than it is to fill out and mail a coupon and then make out a check or money order. The great publishing house of which he is the head is now turning its energies in other directions.

This very brief and sketchy account of subscription and direct mail selling will make it apparent that these methods do not furnish the solution for the problem of a sweeping

expansion of the book market. They are not the panacea we are looking for. Just why this is so is in itself a problem. Perhaps the answer is that neither canvassing nor circularizing nor advertising, no matter how persuasive, can successfully and on a large scale compete for the average man's attention with the automobile, the motion picture, and the radio. What can compete, perhaps, is collections of books placed not only where they can be seen, but where it is impossible not to see them. But it may justly be said that the distribution of good books by subscription or by direct mail encourages the reading habit and makes customers for bookstores, book departments, and other book outlets. These methods are good as far as they go. They do not and cannot go far enough, any more than can the traditional bookstore.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOOK CLUBS

The book club has some of the attributes of the ancient subscription plan (rather than the modern one) in that the books it issues are contracted for in advance of publication; some of the attributes of the mail-order plan, in that the books are sent out, as a rule, by mail; some of the attributes of a correspondence course in that they are supposed in most cases to educate and enlighten those who receive them; and many of the attributes of the magazine in that the reader buys sight-unseen on the recommendation of an editor or an editorial board, although, unlike the magazine reader, he sometimes has the opportunity to substitute his own choice for that of the editor in case he is dissatisfied. The book clubs have perhaps received more attention than their present or prospective importance in the book trade justifies, partly because of their wide advertising, partly because of the controversy which has raged around them. But even when deflated they remain a factor which cannot be ignored.

The book club seems to have originated in Germany not long after the World War. Ten or a dozen were formed and soon had several million members. In Germany, however, the book clubs publish their own titles instead of purchasing them from other publishers. They have been vehemently opposed by trade publishers and by booksellers, since they do not distribute through the regular trade channels. But since they have found it necessary to issue enough titles to give their patrons a wide choice,

they have come more and more to resemble mail-order houses, assuming much the same risks of loss on individual titles as are borne by other publishers. In Great Britain there apparently were no book clubs until the American book-club scheme was taken over a year or two ago.

As nearly as I have been able to ascertain, the American book-club idea was first set forth about 1924 in a pamphlet written by Samuel W. Craig, entitled, "The Literary Guild: An Innovation in Book Publishing." The organization now known as "The Literary Guild" was not, however, established in that year, nor was the Guild the first of the book clubs, nor did Mr. Craig play an important part after the pioneer work had been done. Nevertheless, his pamphlet is historically interesting. The New York Theater Guild was his model.

> The Theater Guild [he announced] has shown that the risk of production may be minimized by presenting new plays to an organized body of supporters who subscribe in advance for the season's productions. The Literary Guild will duplicate in the field of book production the Theater Guild's successful subscription methods in the field of play production. The Literary Guild will offer to subscribers good new books at a substantial reduction over the price at which good books are obtainable to-day. These books will be chosen for production by an Editorial Board of prominent writers and critics with a powerful following and wide influence in the world of books. The Literary Guild will offer to authors a definite audience, an assured sale of their books, higher royalties, and generally better terms than existing publishers are now in a position to offer.

The authoritative board and the assured audience are features of all book-club plans to-day, though the first and largest of the clubs does not offer a reduced price. Moreover, it is far from certain that the author in all cases

receives a larger sum in royalties than he would have received if he had taken the ordinary chances of publishing. On the unit sale he receives less, because the book clubs demand and receive a far larger discount from the publisher than is given any other middlemen, and royalties are reduced accordingly. For the unknown or slightly known author a book-club adoption is a boon; for the writer who already has a popular reputation it may not be.

Mr. Craig indicted rather severely the American methods of selling books, and his comments are pertinent to the general topic of this discussion. "American publishers," he declared, have not taken a single important step forward which would place the merchandising of their product on an equal footing with other nationally consumed goods. They are far behind in business technique. If books were merchandised in the aggressive manner of magazines, breakfast foods, toilet articles, or any other standard commodity, the increase in sales would be enormous." "Failure to develop adequate retail outlets" and "excessively high retail prices" are phrases which by this time should have a familiar ring. Since Mr. Craig wrote, there has been, as we have seen, a considerable development of book outlets, and now we see also a tendency among a few daring publishers to reduce the retail price of new trade books.

The Literary Guild [Mr. Craig went on] has been founded in the belief that there exists in this country a vast market for good books that has not yet been developed. It proposes to reach this potential audience by the means most convenient and familiar to the American public. The publication and sale of books on a national scale upon a subscription basis similar to that which has developed huge circulations for the national magazines will encounter no resistance from a public accustomed and generally responsive to subscription methods. It has been previously pointed out that the American public, sub-

scribing to vast quantities of magazines, habitually obtains its reading by subscription. It is easier to sign on the dotted line and subscribe for a whole year to a magazine than to trouble to visit the bookseller for a single book. The Literary Guild will bring its books to the prospective purchaser. It will overcome the inertia which now prevents hundreds of thousands of people from buying new books simply from the necessity of having to step out to a bookstore. Of twenty probable purchasers of a given work, only one will take the trouble to go to the bookstore and buy; but bring books to the home and half a dozen will buy.

Perhaps Mr. Craig forgot that book canvassers had been doing this very thing since a time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary without making America a bookbuying nation. Nevertheless he, and those who took up this and similar enterprises later on, went into the field with immense enthusiasm and every method of ballyhoo known to advertising science.

It was not, however, the Literary Guild, but the Book-of-the-Month Club that made the initial move. This notable event occurred in April, 1926, when Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Lolly Willowes" went out to the first subscribers. The subsequent selections have ranged all the way from Bernard Shaw to Joan Lowell, and have included John Galsworthy, Edna Ferber, Elinor Wylie, H. G. Wells, C. E. Montague, Carl Sandburg, Booth Tarkington, Stephen Vincent Benét, Professor Beard, Arnold Sweig, Sigrid Undset, Walter Lippmann, Erich Maria Remarque, and O. E. Rolvaag. Of a list of titles which I have before me twenty-nine are fiction, seven are biography, one is history, one is poetry, two are economic, one is scientific, and two are philosophy. In most cases, not in all, the standard has been kept high, and it cannot be doubted that a number of excellent books have secured through this means a far larger distribution, both within

the club membership and without, than could have been secured through any other means.

As this is written, the Book-of-the-Month Club has a subscription list of about 110,000 members — though as the figures fluctuate from month to month they should not be taken as final. Each member binds himself to buy at least four books a year. He pays for these at the list price, though new members have been offered a book free as an inducement to join. He may take the selected book of the month, or he may choose any other current book. In a leaflet which is sent to all members in advance of the publication date, the selected book is described and a dozen or so other books are more briefly reviewed. In about fifty per cent of cases the subscriber takes the selected book, and on an average each subscriber takes eight books a year, or a little more. The Club, therefore, distributes somewhere between 800,000 and 1,000,000 books a year. Incidentally its loss through the subscriber's failure to pay is about the standard one for subscription publishers — five per cent or less.

The Club secures its books from titles submitted by publishers, sometimes in manuscript but more often in proof-sheets. Of these it receives from seventy-five to one hundred every month, which give it a fairly wide range of choice. Its original discount was sixty per cent, but more recently this has risen to seventy per cent. The books are delivered in the regular trade editions, in the publishers' bindings. The business is conducted entirely by mail, and the Club has no warehouses or agencies outside of New York. The volume of its transactions makes it the third largest bookbuyer in the country, though it handles less than one per cent of the general books published. Perhaps it would be a natural step for the Club to invite authors to submit their manuscripts directly to it and to enter the publishing business on its own account.

But this step, which as I have mentioned has been taken by the German book clubs, has not been taken by the Book-of-the-Month Club, nor, so far as I know, has it been seriously contemplated. Its obvious disadvantage would be, as it has been in Germany, that it would make the club a competitior of the publishers.

Except for the authority lent it by the board of distinguished authors and critics who sponsor its choices, therefore, the Book-of-the-Month Club is no more and no less than an ingenious and fairly successful way of getting books from the publisher to the reader. It has not broadened the book market indefinitely, nor shown the way to do so. It has, undoubtedly, added somewhat to the number of habitual readers of good books. How much it has added is uncertain, because we have no way of telling how many of the Club's members habitually visited bookstores before subscribing, and there is no public record of the turnover in its membership. It is quite possible that members of this as of the other book clubs eventually strike out for themselves and so swell the booksellers' profits; it is, however, not easy to convince a bookseller of the truth of this theory.

The method adopted by the Literary Guild differs in several respects from that of the Book-of-the-Month Club. In the first place, the Guild buys the rights to the book instead of the physical book from the publishers, and issues its own editions in its own binding and on its own paper. In the second place, it issues the book to subscribers, according to its announcements, at "exactly half the retail price for the same titles in the ordinary edition." Originally the subscriber was not permitted to reject the offered volume and choose another in its stead. He is now allowed to do so if he returns the book within a stipulated period after its receipt, together with the difference between its actual cost to him and the ordinary market price of

the book chosen in its stead. This may seem an unessential detail to all but those immediately concerned. It is not, however; for the difficulty and bother of making the exchange probably enthrones the principle of editorial authority a little more securely here than is the case with the Book-of-the-Month Club.

The Guild differs from the Club in another respect. Whereas the Club informs its members in advance what they are to expect, the Guild does not; it simply drops the new volume in the subscriber's lap. About six per cent of the seventy thousand subscribers (again I must warn the reader that these figures are only approximate, since they change with the months) refuse the volume offered and ask for another. Members are secured by energetic advertising of a truly modern kind, by circularization and by agents. The Guild made the discovery — and profited thereby — that its potential readers were not those who had the reading habit, but those who had the mail-order habit. Hence it advertised lavishly, not merely in the literary sections, but in the recognized mail-order media. Ordinarily it purchases the rights to a book outright. The customary price for a new book at the end of 1929 was fourteen thousand dollars. Of course it would not be necessary to pay this for Voltaire's "Candide," which the Guild issued late in 1929, though the accompanying drawings by Rockwell Kent may well have been worth that sum. Some two hundred or more manuscripts a month come to the Guild offices and are put expertly through the mill by one of America's best literary critics.

A third form of book club is the Book League of America, whose selections have been issued in magazine form. Here, of course, the subscriber signs up for the year just as he would for "Harper's Magazine" or "The American Mercury," trusting the editors to provide him with a satisfactory bill of fare. The League has gone so

far as to offer the subscriber the regular twelve issues each year and twelve additional "classics," all for the small sum of eighteen dollars, or nineteen dollars on the deferred-payment plan, and has made use of the facilities of a well-known Chicago mail-order house. With the subscription goes a "consultation service" entitling the League members to "receive intelligent answers to inquiries concerning any new book published." It may be natural for the highly educated gentleman with an ancestral account at Brentano's or The Old Corner Book Store to turn up his aristocratic nose at this wheedling commercialism. Yet there are wise critics of book publication and distribution who maintain that without wheedling and without commercialism Americans cannot be got to read books.

On a somewhat similar plan are the "Paper Books," put out by Charles Boni once a month at the present price of five dollars a year, and intended to "place good books, well designed and carefully made, within the reach of any reader." The title of the series stresses a comparatively unimportant point, for the paper binding is not the main item in the cheapness of these books. They are sold to non-subscribers for seventy-five cents each, or to persons whose names are sent in by subscribers at fifty cents each. Of course there is no opportunity for substitution on the part of the subscriber. The question here is whether the publisher can whittle down his manufacturing and selling costs sufficiently to make a profit. I am informed that the books can be manufactured for a shade under twenty cents, and that if fifty thousand or more copies of each title are sold, the publisher will receive a reasonable return on his investment.

Other book clubs at this writing are the Junior Literary Guild, a branch of the parent Guild; the Detective Story Club; the Catholic Book Club; the Free Thought Book Club; and the Religious Book Club. There may be more

or fewer by the time these paragraphs are in print. The total circulation of all these clubs has passed the two hundred thousand point and may climb higher. Altogether they now control a little more than two per cent of the general trade books circulated in the United States. This figure does not seem to me either very menacing or very promising.

It will be edifying to consider what is the editorial method and theory behind the clubs, what their sales appeal is, and precisely why there has been so much controversy about them. We may then ask what, if anything, they have to tell us about the future. It is plain, to begin with, that the book clubs appealed very cleverly to a psychological weakness in their publics. I do not say this critically, for most of the things other than food, clothing, and shelter that are sold us are disposed of because of our psychological weaknesses. America was developing a taste for "culture"; "culture" was becoming a social asset. One aspect of "culture" was the ability to talk about the latest book. Every year there were six or a dozen "best-sellers." How were these best-sellers picked out? Apparently, so far as the public could tell, by the voices of eminent critics. The critics said they were good and therefore people read them. This was not true, but it seemed to be. So it seemed plausible to suppose that if the most eminent critics who could be found were hired to pass judgment on books about to be published, rather than books already published, they could select the probable books of the season and so enable the favored subscribers to become "cultured" before any one else could.

The critics were hired — and there was no question about their eminence. In each case the book-club selection increased the regular trade sale — that is to say, it is almost certain that nearly always the book sold more as a regular trade book, apart from its sale to book-club members, than

it would have sold had it not been a club selection. Book-club selections are in themselves important enough to earn a book at least the thoughtful consideration of critics and reviewers. Consequently most of the club selections start with what is called a "good press" — a better press occasionally than their bare merits deserve. It thus turns out that whether the subscriber likes the selection or not, he has at least been steered to a book which is in the public eye and which will be recognized as a suitable topic for dinner-table conversation.

Some of the advertising has rested and still rests on what has come to be known by the short and simple title of "the snob appeal." "Out of the tens of thousands of books printed," so runs one eloquent "blurb," "there are a select few that the real people read." Who, given such an opportunity, would not choose to be one of the "real people"? Or take this: "What would it profit the Eager Reader to get his book a month after every wise one has read it?" Or this, in somewhat lighter vein: "You ring for the butler and tell him to lay the Right Book on top of the library table where the lamplight will fall on it. So that all the guests will see that you are of the elect and belong to the Literary Guild." Or this: "Take your pen now and separate yourself from that group of people one never meets and seldom hears about — those who ignore the advantages of ——" the particular book club in question. This is the snob appeal being a trifle sophisticated and poking fun at itself. But it is still the snob appeal.

This is *sales* talk. It comes *after* the selections have been made. No one familiar with the editorial boards of the better-known clubs will doubt that they operate on a somewhat higher plane. Yet they would be less than human — and certainly of a finer clay than most publishers — if they did not at times consider the selling appeal

of their choices. An editorial board expressing only its own highly cultivated tastes cannot at the same time express as accurately the less cultivated tastes of a hundred thousand or more readers. This is precisely what every magazine editor knows. It is a condition of his existence to which he bows. If he is sufficiently high-minded, he tries to raise the standards of his readers, but not at the expense of reducing his circulation.

In the same way a successful book-club choice needs to have not only the attributes of a good book, but also those of a best-seller. The club's great advantage over the ordinary publisher — an advantage that will diminish if the number of clubs increases — is that each of its books starts with considerable good-will, though much of this may be pure inertia, in its favor. The clubs can and do "put over" mediocre books. They deserve high praise because they have issued so many that are much above the mediocre. But it is impossible to view them judiciously without perceiving that there is a certain amount of hokum connected with them — necessary hokum, perhaps, amiable hokum, honest hokum, well-meant hokum, but hokum nevertheless. The actual amount of hokum varies considerably from club to club. I shall not draw invidious distinctions. If the books themselves are not hokum — and I can think of but one book issued by an important club which would now be generally admitted to come under that head — we need not worry too much about the advertising.

The principal objections to the book clubs have not come, of course, from disinterested observers. The booksellers have generally opposed them because they seemed, in direct proportion to their success, to hurt the retail book business. Thus, as President Arthur Brentano, Jr., of the American Booksellers' Association, said at the Boston convention in May, 1929: "In setting up a committee of critical authority to select the outstanding book of the

month for their subscribers the book clubs have usurped the inalienable right of every bookbuyer and book-reader to think for himself and to select his own literary diet, *thereby removing one of the incentives for visiting bookstores.*" The italics are my own. "In other words," Mr. Brentano went on, "when you have one hundred thousand or more bookbuyers sitting tight in the smug satisfaction of getting the so-called best book of each month, that someone else has chosen for them, you are undermining the book-browsing habit; you are taking sales away from many, many titles that are of equal value to the prescribed diet."

The problem which this statement brings up will no doubt be with us a long time. No customer can "browse" intelligently among 8300 new titles and 1800 new editions, even though a bookseller could afford to lay them all out before him. Even though a large bookstore selects several thousand of them, it has already eliminated a great many — doing to a limited extent exactly what the book clubs do with such appalling completeness. Moreover, every bookstore displays certain books, of which it has bought heavily, and "plays down" the others. In effect, therefore, it chooses for its customers. The multiplicity of titles, which nearly every one in the book trade deplores and which few in the book trade do anything about, has made the production of selected book lists a major occupation of librarians, teachers, critics, and booksellers themselves. A Chicago bookseller started a "book-a-month" plan for his customers as early as 1917. Others have more or less closely imitated the scheme. In brief, a selective process, over which the ultimate consumer has almost as little control as he has over the sifting-out of presidential candidates in a great national convention, begins with the submission of manuscripts to publishers and ends only when the customer's book is wrapped up

and ready to deliver or mail to him. Without some guidance no one who is not himself a specialist in modern literature can choose wisely.

If it is true, as has been stated, that a title selected by a book club will ordinarily sell more copies in a regular trade edition than it would have done if it had not been singled out, then the bookseller loses nothing on that particular book. He may, however, lose because the sale of this one book crowds out other books which might otherwise have had a chance for at least a moderate success. But here, again, the objection really is, not that certain books are picked out to receive attention, but to the method of picking them out. Like any other retail merchant the bookseller gains by a quick turnover. It is more economical for him to sell a thousand copies of a single title than ten copies of each of a hundred titles; the stock moves faster, costs him less to handle, does not require so much of the salesman's time. But naturally he would rather sell his fraction of a book club's hundred thousand copies, at a gross profit of a dollar or more on each one, than have the club divert that profit into its own pockets.

The book clubs' side of the case was excellently presented at the Boston convention by Mr. Harold Guinzburg, of the Literary Guild. Mr. Guinzburg chose a particularly apt example, that of the man who is held by many critics to be America's foremost poet.

> I am referring [he said] to Edwin Arlington Robinson's great poem, "Tristram," which was selected by the Literary Guild . . . and sent out to its membership, which was then about ten thousand subscribers. Robinson had probably been the leading American poet for very many years, had been writing and publishing books for twenty-five or thirty years and twice won the Pulitzer Prize. He had every critical recognition, everything that an author can have except sales. The maximum sale up to that time on any one of his books had been four

thousand copies. That book was distributed by a book club . . . although everybody assumed that it was a very bad selection the people curiously enough liked the book. . . . They didn't know this man Robinson — who was he? And Macmillan Company has sold sixty-five thousand copies of that book, in addition to the book-club distribution, through the bookstores.

I may point out here, as a bookseller pointed out at the Boston convention, that publishers in many instances have enabled bookstores to compete with the clubs by cutting the retail prices for general sales of book-club selections. Of course this furnishes an argument which cuts both ways, since it shows that the clubs, directly and indirectly, have brought Robinson and other notable authors within the reach of customers who might not otherwise have been able to afford them.

The book-club situation, so far as it affects the public interest, may be reduced to two points: first, the problem of selection; second, the probable future development of the clubs. The gist of the preceding discussions seems to me to be that if book-club editors make good selections, the public gains, and if they make bad selections, the public loses. The essential fallacy in the case for book-club selections is that a book club's board of editors is likely to be less fallible than a publisher's. The book-club editors, like the publisher, are offering their judgment for sale. Their advantage over the publisher is that because of the subscription feature they are not damned by a single mistake. If their club is well organized, any book they choose to recommend will have at least a sufficient distribution to pay expenses, even though it turns out to be neither good nor interesting. A publisher under similar circumstances must take a loss. But in the long run book clubs, like publishing houses, must stand by the results of their choices. They are even more subject to this rule than are publishers, for in general the public neither knows nor cares

who publishes a book, whereas it is keenly alive to the character of the book clubs to which it pays its money.

There is reason to believe that most book clubs suffer from a rapid turnover in their subscription lists. One or two unpopular books are sufficient to make hundreds or perhaps thousands of subscribers drop out. It is also probably true that, regardless of the quality of the books selected, a large percentage of subscribers will grow tired of having their reading chosen for them — and would grow tired even though an archangel were doing the choosing. Like certain newspapers, the book clubs may have to find a completely new set of readers every few years if they are even to maintain their subscription lists at the present level. They may be so successful in educating their public that their public will outgrow them. If this is the case, they may be regarded as a cultural boon.

At least, it seems fairly certain that they are not on the main highway of the future expansion of the book trade. That expansion does not lie in the direction of blind buying, no matter how clear-sighted the leaders of the blind may be. It lies, as I shall hope to show before I am through, in placing a multitude of books, at a variety of prices, within the reach of all those who are interested or can be made to become interested in reading. There is a limit to every mail-order campaign, and to the number of books which can be disposed of by even the most persuasive subscription methods. These limits probably have not been reached, but they are narrow enough to make it certain that neither by mail orders, nor by book agents, nor by book clubs can America be made a book-reading nation.

In the next chapter I shall consider some of the varieties of low-priced books. In this field there are already enterprises which can more than meet the usual book-club

rates without imposing upon the buyers any of the club restrictions or delays. They have a significance so much greater than that of the book clubs — at least quantitatively — that there is absolutely no comparison between the two methods.

CHAPTER VIII

BARGAIN-COUNTER BOOKS

If this chapter had been written a few weeks earlier, one of the most significant developments in publishing since the World War might have had to be left out. If the writing could be postponed a year or two, it might be possible to tell precisely what the significance of the event is. I refer, of course, to the announcement made by several publishers at the end of May, 1930, of drastic price cuts for at least some of their new titles. New fiction at $1 or $1.50 and other books at retail prices considerably lower than those currently prevailing, were offered, amid mingled hisses and applauses, as part of a campaign to reach a wider circle of readers and to encourage buying in place of borrowing and renting.

The discussion which followed this "bomb," as the newspaper reporters luridly but not inaccurately called it, was lively and acrimonious. Alfred Knopf expressed the opinions of some dissenting publishers when he declared in a newspaper statement:

> The announcement . . . is the crowning example of the chronic inferiority complex from which the book business in this country seems always to have suffered. I regard the decision of these publishers at this juncture as short-sighted, unwise, and likely, if it has any effect whatsoever, to have a very disturbing effect indeed on the industry as a whole. Considering the investment of time, industry, intelligence, and often genius which goes into the author's share of making a book, and considering as well the immense capital required to be invested before books can be composed, electrotyped, printed, and bound, and the paper and cloth that goes into their manufacture, and

considering furthermore the inescapable fact that good books are still of interest to only a small part of the population of the United States, books have always been and are, at present prices, far too cheap. . . . It should be obvious to any one but a lunatic that you cannot sell for $1 the same sort of book or the same sort of looking book that has sold for years at $2.50. In the United States to-day it is clear that publishing books, apart from textbooks, is in effect a luxury business. Publishers have suffered for years from a form of megalomania which has made them feel themselves potential General Electric Companies, American Telephone and Telegraph Companies, and United States Steel Corporations. This is doubtless very gratifying to the individual who feels that way, but the truth is that the book business in this country is, from a dollar and cents point of view, very small indeed. The fundamental difficulty under which the entire industry has been laboring lies in the fact that the average retail bookseller cannot make a living wage out of the conduct of his book business. The reason for this lies, not in the discounts he gets, but in the fact that in the average American community there are not enough people who will buy sufficient books to make his volume big enough to give him that living wage.

Ten leading publishing houses, in a joint statement, denounced the cut prices as "economically unsound."

The implication that the publisher has been making an undue profit [they declared] is without basis. As a matter of fact, book publishing is notoriously a "low-profit" business. Any banker or auditor familiar with conditions of book publishing will corroborate this statement. It is our belief that the present method of original publication followed, after a reasonable time, by a reprint publication at a price lower in many instances than that now proposed, is vastly more to the advantage of author, bookseller, publisher, and public. We feel that any radical departure from the present publishing custom will prove injurious to the interests of all concerned, and it is the intention of the houses signing this statement to avoid fundamental changes in their present methods of publishing.

It would be foolish for a layman, however impartial, to pass final judgment on the issue until the experiment has actually been tried. But for the purposes of the present discussion it is reasonable to point out that Mr. Knopf's position is inconsistent with some of the data I have already brought forward or will bring forward in later chapters. It may be clear that publishing *is* a luxury business. It is not equally clear that it *need* be. It may be true that under existing bookselling conditions there are not "in the average American community enough people who will buy sufficient books to make the bookseller's volume big enough to give him a living wage." But I do not believe that it is true that this public is limited by any law of nature or that it cannot be vastly enlarged by new methods replacing or supplementing the older methods. The joint statement which I have quoted above hits more closely to the mark. The facts presented in the fourth chapter of our survey prove plainly enough that publishing is a "low-profit" business, and the same thing, as will presently be demonstrated also, is true of bookselling. A lower profit on the turnover, with a correspondingly lower retail price, is possible only if the volume of business is increased. Without this increased volume of business, the new dollar book will be published and sold at a loss. The first new dollar books undoubtedly will earn nothing but a deficit for all concerned. Only experience can show whether aggressive selling, joined with the economies resulting from (comparatively) large-scale production, can turn this deficit into a profit.

The reader will have noted the reference in the publishers' statement to reprint publication, "after a reasonable time, at a price lower in many instances than that now proposed." Leaving the cut-price issue to the logic of events, so much more inexorable than any arguments that can now be brought to bear, pro or con, let us consider the

present status, first of cheap books in general, then of reprint books. A walk through the shopping streets of any large city or a glance through the advertising pages of any literary magazine or supplement is evidence that books of certain sorts can already be had at surprisingly low prices. Publishers' remainders are one source of such bargains. In my mail I find a card advertising "25,000 books at from 25 to 60 per cent discount." I may drop in at a New York store and purchase any of them or they will be delivered to my address. A Fifth Avenue shop window is filled with books which can be bought at thirty-nine cents apiece, though they were published at several times that price. Browsing around in cigar-stores and drug-stores I find numerous similar bargains — in most cases, to be sure, of books that I don't want, and that no one else has wanted enough to pay the list price for. As each sale represents a loss, they are relics of somebody's bad judgment. They are no part of a rational system of book distribution any more than salvaging operations are part of a rational system of steamship operation.

But if I look at other counters and shelves in cigar-stores, drug-stores, and bookstores I find a considerable number of books made to sell at low prices, and at those prices bringing in a reasonable profit to publishers and retailers. Such bargain-counter books represent the nearest thing the book world has to the bargain-counter automobiles of Henry Ford. The contents of books cannot be standardized any more than an automobile could be standardized if the purchaser demanded a different number of wheels or an entirely new body design every time he went riding. But the methods of manufacture can be. We have seen that the publisher can cut his costs considerably — sometimes even in half — if he can be sure of a minimum sale of twenty-five thousand or more. He can cut them still further if he eliminates royalties, which, of course,

he cannot do with a new book. The low-priced-book lists consequently fall into two classes — standard books on which no royalty need be paid, and modern books which are thought to have exhausted their market at the higher prices, but may still find readers at bargain rates.

A few years ago the Woolworth stores tried the experiment of selling a limited list of classics, bound in stiff covers, for ten cents each. Apparently the enterprise was not conspicuously successful. More recently it has been reported that a plan was under way to sell reprinted modern books in chain stores in ten-cent sections, with four or more sections making up the equivalent of a complete book. Perhaps the cheapest books — in price, at least — which ever made a marked commercial success in the United States are those "Little Blue Books" of which Mr. Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, as far back as three years ago, had already sold a hundred million copies. Curiously enough — and this is one of the little ironies of the publishing business — Mr. Haldeman-Julius has told the story of his five-cent books in a book issued in New York at $2.50. A little later, I may return to the question of readers' tastes as they are illustrated in Mr. Haldeman-Julius's experiences. Just now I shall confine myself to what he has to say about the economics of his business. When he wrote his book he had more than twelve hundred titles on his lists. The first two hundred and fifty of these were reprints from the classics, beginning with the "Rubáiyát" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." But after reaching this point, Mr. Haldeman-Julius decided that it would be possible to pay authors for writing or collecting material and still make a profit at the five-cent price. The standard Little Blue Book contains fifteen thousand words and sixty-four pages. That is, it is about one fifth the comfortable minimum length for a full-length book such as the ordinary publisher sells for $2, $2.50, or more. Consequently it is about

equivalent to a standard-sized book selling for twenty-five cents.

On this slender margin, Mr. Haldeman-Julius was able to pay authors flat sums — not royalties. Some of his authors either were well known or subsequently became so, among them Will Durant, Clement Wood, James Oppenheim, Floyd Dell, and Ludwig Lewisohn. Sometimes the little volumes were specially illustrated. Naturally Mr. Haldeman-Julius does not tell us what he paid his authors. He must have paid a living wage, however, for some of them continued to work for him over long periods of time. They worked fast. One of them, Joseph McCabe, took a contract to do fifty volumes, the equivalent of eight or ten full-sized books, in a single year. In most cases, of course, profound scholarship does not spill itself at this rate. Mr. Haldeman-Julius's system of getting books written resembles his system of getting them printed — it is a department of mass production. It is successful with writers of sufficient facility, and is surely no more to be sneered at than most of our journalism.

Publication began at a price of twenty-five cents. The price was brought down by economies in production and distribution. The books were standardized, so that most of them would include an exact sixty-four pages, though some were extended to ninety-six or one hundred and twenty-eight pages, or limited to thirty-two pages. A single press was procured which printed four complete books at every double revolution of its cylinders and forty thousand complete books in eight hours. Paper was bought from the mills in carload lots. The electrotype was introduced. In short, the methods adopted were strikingly similar to those used in getting out the great modern newspapers or magazines. Never less than ten thousand copies of a book were printed at a time and often the run was thirty thousand copies. As many as 25,000,000 little

volumes were printed in a single year. The books have been sold by mail, in quantities of twenty or more at a time. That is to say, the business is "fully ninety-five per cent a mail-order business."

This means, of course, that it has been built up and maintained by advertising. This has been carefully placed. Mr. Haldeman-Julius did not find the "mail-order" periodicals, most of which go into rural homes, very profitable. Nor, at the other end of the scale, were the "quality" magazines. Neither were the specialized trade publications, school and college papers and magazines, and women's magazines. It was learned, by careful analysis of sales made through advertisements in one national magazine, that only about thirty per cent of the sales were to women. One sees that Mr. Haldeman-Julius studied his public a great deal more carefully than the ordinary publisher does. Advertising with him is not a superstition or a gesture, but a vehicle of measurable power and capacity. If he can sell a book to a new patron at an advertising cost of not more than two and a half cents, he is satisfied. An advertisement which pays its costs within three weeks, as can readily be ascertained by identification marks on the returned coupons, is a success. The temptation to make the Blue Books more like magazines by printing advertisements on the covers has been resisted. By such means as these Mr. Haldeman-Julius had built up, by the end of 1927, a list of 500,000 persons who had ordered his books.

I shall not go into the question of the quality of his lists, except to concede that at least a part of it undoubtedly consists of "serious" books — though, technically speaking, they might be more correctly listed as pamphlets. The important question for our present discussion is whether his experience throws any light upon the possibility of a wider book market. If 100,000,000 little books can be

sold for five cents each, could a similar market be found for full-length books, sold, perhaps, at twenty-five cents each? Are the same economies of printing and distribution possible in the case of standard books? Could such books be printed and bound sufficiently well to be attractive to readers who will already pay twenty-five or thirty-five cents cheerfully enough for a magazine? If a person of Henry Ford's business genius and with as great an interest in getting books to the American public as Mr. Ford has had in getting automobiles to them should arise, the answer might be affirmative.

Even cheaper than Mr. Haldeman-Julius's books, in number of words to the penny, are those ten-cent editions of the classics to which I referred a few paragraphs back. Mass production, in a region where labor was doubtless cheaper than that Mr. Haldeman-Julius could command, helped to make these books possible. They were printed, not by the hundred, but by the tens of thousands. It is not impossible that books like these could be published now, if an author were willing to take a royalty of perhaps a cent a copy in the hope of getting his profit from a vastly wider audience than he could command through the regular trade channels. In publishing of this sort, all the traditions and methods of cost accounting used in the regular publishing houses are cast to the winds. I cannot imagine a more painful experience than the visit of an old-line publisher to such a literary factory. All the charm and beauty of books as books, apart from what is printed in them, is lost. Yet, if cheapness is the solution of book distribution, this possibility cannot be dismissed lightly. Only if we assume that the American people as a whole are not too poor to pay as much for a book as it costs to take the average family to the motion pictures or for a Sunday afternoon drive in the country can we disregard it. Even then we cannot escape the fact that if any book whatever can

be sold at a profit for five or ten cents, there is probably some way of selling the very best books at much less than the prevailing retail prices — even though that way does not lie inside the present channels of production and distribution.

I referred in the last chapter to the Boni Paper Books. These, when sold in lots of twelve — that is, one a month for a year — cost the reader a little less than forty-two cents apiece. The paper cover serves at once as jacket and cover. For a few cents additional a cloth binding could be provided, and perhaps the use of paper is a clever advertising device rather than a necessity. The economy in the manufacture of these books is, of course, that of relatively large-scale production. They would not be profitable if five thousand copies of each were sold; they probably are when fifty thousand are sold. Even at fifty cents, they are two dollars or a dollar and a half below the price that might be obtained, always excepting the "cut-rate" publishers, for the same book in cloth covers. Their value as serious literature is, of course, a matter for the critics to determine; some of them certainly would come under that classification. But they are limited by the limitations of the book-club idea. They do not tell us how to cheapen the price of *serious new* books for readers who prefer to make their own choices.

Leaving behind for the moment the discussion of the publication of new books at bargain prices, we come to the subject of cheap editions of the classics, of standard modern books which are on the way to becoming classics, and of popular books which still have some life in them. The practice of reprinting the classics in cheap editions is by no means new. Karl Christopher Traugott Tauchnitz was publishing the works of Greek and Roman authors a century and a quarter ago and the Tauchnitz Library of British and American Authors goes back to 1841. The

Everyman's Library, long familiar to both English and American readers, is said to have sold 25,000,000 copies in less than a quarter of a century. Almost every publisher has found it profitable to maintain a "series," on a large or small scale, devoted either to modern or classic books, and usually at a price considerably lower than standard trade editions. From the publisher's point of view such series have the advantage of a sure sale, extending over a period of years, which, after the cost of the plates is written off, is satisfactorily remunerative. If the titles are well chosen, such a series detracts nothing from the publisher's dignity — unless, of course, he associates dignity with high prices.

New ventures into this publishing specialty continue to be successful. One New York house, which entered the field not many years ago, now divides its efforts between a low-priced series, which as I write has about one hundred and sixty titles, selling at ninety-five cents each, and the publication of limited editions, some of them selling as high as one hundred dollars a volume. In the last year of record it disposed of some 500,000 copies of the lower-priced books. Such a business lends itself to a high degree of specialization in manufacture and distribution. Nevertheless, the publishers have found that variety of form is helpful to sales. Only the size of the page is now uniform in all their books. Paper, type, margins, and number of pages vary greatly in the individual instance. A special jacket, bearing the easily recognizable identification mark of the series, but otherwise adapted to the individuality of the book for which it is to be used, has begun to replace the standardized wrapper. The number of pages has ranged all the way from 125 to 600. Sometimes, as in the case of an edition of Whistler, paintings and engravings illustrative of the text are included. In this case the cost of production and distribution probably exceeded

the retail price, but this loss was more than made up by the profit on less costly books.

This series, which was taken over from a general publisher who had grown tired of it or was unable to make satisfactory profits with it, was at first largely classical. In a few instances books have been compiled especially for it — as was the case with a recent collection of poetry by Negro authors; but this is expensive and therefore unusual. Books are selected very carefully, their sales value being judged by the author's reputation, if he is living, and by their sale in the ordinary trade edition. No matter how famous the author, it is not thought profitable to include, as a rule, more than one book by the same individual.

Some titles fail to fulfill expectations. At the end of 1929, for instance, the speeches of Woodrow Wilson stood at the foot of the list and were not moving fast enough to pay for the trouble of handling them. Such titles, after having had a chance to prove themselves, are ruthlessly dropped. As a rule it is profitable to keep a book in the list if its sales are as many as twelve hundred a year. The maximum circulation of an individual book, so far, has been about eighteen thousand a year. The books are sent out by mail, in which case the customer pays an additional five cents, or sold through bookstores and other book outlets. For a dollar, therefore, any one in the United States may have such a book left on his doorstep or in his mail-box — which is, of course, true of a dozen other series, with slight variations in the price. But the publishers in this case find that they are not reaching the rural and small-town population which might be expected, if properly approached, to grasp at such an opportunity. They think of their business as "high-brow and big-city." The bulk of their sales are in the New York area.

Another publisher started not long ago to build up a series of dollar books "that the average man and woman interested in biography, travel, music, science, astronomy, the mind, national and economic progress will find of more than ordinary interest," as part of a large publishing business — a small part but an interesting and growing one. Of course this is not a "series" at all in the old Tauchnitz sense, for the titles chosen are modern, and sooner or later wear out their popularity and are replaced by others. These "dollar books" were grouped and featured in the retail stores, including a large number which were not bookstores, and an effort was made to popularize the publisher's imprint and to identify the series in the reader's mind. A selling point of importance was the emphasis upon the difference between the uniform reprint price of one dollar and the higher price, sometimes as much as five dollars, at which the books had originally been issued.

It is clear, of course, that a one-dollar edition of a five-dollar book is really a by-product, much as cotton-seed oil is a by-product of the manufacture of cotton. But it is a by-product having the same intrinsic characteristics as the original. Paper and binding may not be what they were in the expensive editions, but they are vastly more than one fifth as good. This publisher's experience, like that of others in similar enterprises, has been that there is no exact connection between a book's sales in the original trade edition and its sale as a reprint. Sometimes the trade sale will be larger than the reprint sale, sometimes it will be smaller. The moral that this publisher sees in this fact is that the dollar-book market is not only a different market from the standard-price market, but that it has different standards of taste and judgment. In the first place, it probably buys books because it wishes to read them, not, as many buyers of current trade books do, to display them on a center table. By the

time a book has reached the reprint stage, its prestige value is greatly diminished and those who read for fashion are reading something else. But it also seems likely that the wider public reached by cheap editions is from a different cultural stratum — not necessarily a lower one. At least it may not remain so, for if good books mean anything — and a reasonable proportion of reprinted books really are good books — they will eventually educate their readers. They may even influence the literature of the day quite profoundly as the cheaper editions grow economically more important to the publisher and the author. This particular publisher, I should add, was so well satisfied with his non-fiction reprint series that he recently disposed of the fiction reprint series which he had been building up.

A probable development which this man foresees is the shortening of the time between the original issue of a book, particularly of a work of fiction, and its appearance in a reprint edition. Already this period has been cut down in many instances from two years to a year, and in some to six months. Naturally it is, and probably will remain, longer in the case of non-fiction than of fiction. Works in the fields of biography, history, economics, philosophy, and science are likely to sell over a period of years in the original edition, and most publishers plan to carry over a substantial part of their list from year to year. But even in these fields the jazz era has quickened the pace. It might almost be said that to the degree in which the element of entertainment is injected into a book, no matter what its subject, the more risk it runs of being outmoded. For style in entertainment now changes almost as rapidly as styles in women's skirts. This does not mean that entertaining books will not survive — a glance at some of the oldest classics points the absurdity of such an argument. But it means that like works of fiction they have to run a deadly gantlet.

With fiction, the period between publication and reprint might conceivably dwindle to two or three months, for the simple reason that the ordinary work of fiction under present conditions has usually run its brief course in that time in the regular trade edition. If and when this happens the trade edition may come to resemble the Broadway run of a play — or perhaps, since "the Road" has almost disappeared, one had better say of a motion picture. It will not, perhaps, be knowingly produced at a loss, as some motion pictures on Broadway have been, in order to gain prestige in the provinces. Yet the publisher may begin to have in mind from the first the possibility of a remunerative reprint sale, either over his own name or over that of a house which specializes in reprints, and he may direct his publicity and advertising and even select his manuscripts with this end in view.

The reprint book business, as distinguished from the publication of classical "series," began about a quarter of a century ago and is in process of rapid change and development. What is perhaps the largest firm in this phase of the book trade has some eight thousand active accounts — three thousand of them with drug-stores, others with bookstores, hardware stores, groceries, and even undertakers; carries about one thousand titles at seventy-five cents each and a hundred of a higher type at one dollar each, in addition to about one thousand juveniles, most of them written for first publication with this firm and sold at fifty cents each; and has a turnover, in gross, of perhaps 12,000,000 volumes a year — five or six per cent of the total general book business done in the United States.

These volumes are not cheap in anything but price, when compared with the general level of trade books. In this respect there has been a vast improvement in the reprint trade within the past four or five years. For seventy-five cents the reader may have a book as well bound and printed

as many regularly issued at two dollars and two dollars and a half. For a dollar he may buy one which to the layman seems in some respects handsomer and more solidly put together than the regular trade book. There is no reason why this should not be so. Let us take a dollar reprint and see where the customer's money goes. Twelve cents of it will probably be paid to the original trade publisher as royalty for the use of the plates, to be divided equally between the said publisher and the author. The book will be manufactured for thirty cents — in the case I am describing it will be contracted for with one of those large printing plants in Tennessee, to which I have already referred, and in which large-scale methods and not too expensive local labor help to keep costs below those in ordinary publishing plants.

Ten thousand or more copies will be turned out on a single order, as against the three or four thousand or even less with which a trade publisher will launch a new author. Thirty cents a copy is therefore an ample appropriation with which to make a really beautiful book. Two cents additional will be charged to the general advertising of the firm. The bookseller will be allowed a discount of about forty cents. That is, the publisher will receive about sixty cents for a book which has already cost him forty-four cents to make and advertise. Out of his margin of sixteen cents must come the cost of selling and that mysterious accounting item known as overhead. What is left is profit. It is a small profit, rolling up to large sums only because of large sales and quick turnover. Here, if not in the book itself, there is some justification for calling reprints, as some one has done, "the Fords of the book business." A few steps more in this direction and it would be a wise man who would say just where the expansion of the Ford method, as applied to making and selling reprint books, would have to stop.

This company, like several of its competitors, made the discovery ten or fifteen years ago that its commodities could be successfully sold only by an aggressive selling campaign. It was necessary to make bookbuyers of persons who were not so already. This had to be done largely by reaching a public which did not go into the existing bookstores. The first step was to convert drug-store proprietors and managers of other retail shops which could carry books, but did not. This was accomplished by an intensive selling campaign, exactly as though the product to be sold had been a razor-blade or a line of five-cent candy-bars. Racks were designed and distributed, so that the books could be readily displayed. The rather dingy covers which had once been placed on reprint books were superseded by highly colored ones. Sometimes the jackets used in the original edition were taken over; more often a new one was designed; and now in the dollar books the new one is often quite as satisfying æsthetically as the original one.

Prices underwent many fluctuations. They were originally fifty cents. The growing cost of materials sent them up to seventy-five, then to eighty-five. Finally, seventy-five cents became the standard price for the more popular books, whose minimum sale could be determined in advance with some certainty, and a dollar was charged for books of a more serious nature, more painstakingly gotten up. In some current instances the same book may be had in both the seventy-five-cent and the dollar edition, and the publishers believe that the seventy-five-cent public and the dollar public are so clearly defined that there is no competition between the two editions. As a rule the cheaper books fall into types — "Westerns," detective stories, jazz romances, and fiction for the flapper. Only when an extraordinary amount of attention has been drawn to a more serious book — particularly if it is taken over for

motion-picture production — is it put into the seventy-five-cent edition. This does not mean that the cheaper series is invariably trivial. It is likely to be so, but its main requisites are simplicity and rapid movement — qualities which some not altogether negligible fiction has had. It may be trash. It need not be.

Sales extend over a much longer period than those of trade books and sometimes run to huge figures. A line of thirty new titles in juvenile fiction (though this is off the main line of our present topic) has sold five or six million copies. The adventures of Tarzan the Ape Man were read by half a million people last year and may be read by a million this year. There are many instances of books which were flat failures or only moderate successes in the trade editions which have sold by tens and even hundreds of thousands in reprint editions. Several very popular and successful authors — though not all of them are authors who are taken seriously by the critics — have been "made" by the reprint houses. One of Sabatini's novels fell flat in the trade edition; it has sold three or four hundred thousand as a reprint. Another recent book went to ten thousand copies in the trade edition, was produced as a motion picture and in a few weeks reached one hundred thousand as a reprint. A motion-picture production may send the circulation of a book from a little more than nothing to a million or more a year. In consequence the reprint houses watch trends in motion pictures with the assiduity of a cat at a mouse-hole. A classic of many years' standing, or a best-seller of a generation ago, revives instantly if the "pictures" take it up. "Anna Karenina" sold fifty thousand copies in a few weeks under such stimulus. "Dracula," a generation old, did one hundred thousand in two years. "The Covered Wagon" has sold five hundred thousand copies since it was made into a motion picture. In short, no book is too dead or too old to be restored to

vigorous life once its characters have moved — and in the last few years talked — upon the silver screen.

The reprint book business is thus a kind of liaison between the motion-picture public, on the one hand — that is to say, the literate portion of the motion-picture public — and the bookstore public on the other hand. Some authors have actually made their reputations in the reprint field, with subsequent successes in the regular trade editions. Astute publishers recognize this possibility and have been known to sell books to the reprint houses even when they were still moving profitably at the regular trade prices. It is possible to think of the reprint houses as a kind of ladder by which readers climb from motion pictures or fiction of the motion-picture type to something of a more serious nature. The juvenile books are regarded as feeders for the cheaper adult books, to which young people graduate in their early teens; these, in turn, are feeders for the better grade of adult books; and the dollar books probably graduate readers to the regular trade editions of newer books. A reader has liked a book by a well-known and gifted writer in the dollar edition; when this same writer issues another book in the trade edition, the reader is quite likely to want it at once. A convert has thus been made and the too-limited circle of those who habitually buy current books has been expanded. In time this recruiting process becomes important.

I am not for a moment contending that the reprint publishers think of themselves as cultural missionaries. On the contrary, they conceive of themselves, if they wish to survive, as business men engaged in a fascinating but highly competitive enterprise. But they are constantly making it possible for a wider circle of readers to come in contact with books, many of them of no great significance, but some as good as any that can be had at any price. They are going out of the regular traditional channels of publica-

tion and distribution to confront possible readers with books, and in a measure doing for profit what the libraries do in the public interest. And they are bringing to light some facts which have significance for the entire book trade. They are proving that the public outside the traditional bookstore system is not unanimously Philistine or mentally sub-normal. The best and most serious books sometimes have the longest lives as reprints. A certain flashy and sensational novel not long ago went to one hundred and fifty thousand copies in a year in its first reprint editions. Next year it dropped to fifteen thousand. To-day it is negligible. More solid books plod on year after year. And they are read, not because it is the fashion to do so — for a reprinted book is by definition, almost, a book that has gone out of fashion — but because people find in them something to attract and interest.

I must emphasize again one more distinction between trade publishers and reprint publishers. The trade publisher, as we have seen, rarely succeeds in popularizing his imprint. No one cares who *publishes* a new book. The trade publisher must treat each new book as though it were, as indeed it is, a new business enterprise. But the reprint publisher, with his hundreds of titles a year, obviously cannot do this. He can rarely afford to advertise an individual book. What he advertises is his price and his series. Every one is familiar with the displays of books accompanied by the slogan, "No book over one dollar." I have on my desk a rather imposing list of one-dollar books issued by the Wisconsin State Library Commission. Some city libraries have had displays of such books in campaigns to encourage bookbuying. There are at least eighteen important series now being sold at a dollar or less. Each one of these has its characteristic imprint and form, and each tries to sell one book on the reputation of the whole list.

It is clear that as matters stand the trade publisher and the reprint publisher are interdependent. The trade publisher relies on the reprint house as a source of clear profit over and above what he can earn through the regular channels. The reprint publisher counts on the trade publisher to select manuscripts and give them a try-out. In most cases he does not have to speculate, even though he may find a far larger public than the original publisher has been able to reach. But this relation between regular editions and reprints makes it highly improbable that the reprint publishers will take what might seem to be a logical step and become cut-price publishers of new adult books of their own selection. In the case I mentioned a few moments ago, a reprint house could afford to issue new juvenile fiction because juvenile fiction is highly standardized and because juvenile readers recruit the ranks of adult readers. To attempt the same thing with adult fiction of originality and cultural value is an enterprise of a wholly different complexion. What the reprint houses have done is to prove the existence of a large bookbuying or potentially bookbuying public not reached through the older trade channels. A reprint house can afford to send salesmen to establish outlets in stores in towns of as little as one thousand population. This is something that few, even, of the subscription houses, with their professional agents, are willing to attempt. The mail-order houses, though exceedingly willing, have not been successful in such communities.

It seems certain that publishers of new cut-rate books will not succeed unless they can duplicate in a measure the work of the reprint houses. They will need capital, energy, imagination, and patience. Lacking in any one of these assets, their undertaking will be a flash in the pan. But whether as new books or as reprints — and I am not sure that it greatly matters which they are — the possibili-

ties of cheap editions, widely and aggressively sold, are almost unlimited. A few years more may see books on sale at every crossroads and every filling station, at prices from one dollar down. Some of them will be good books.

CHAPTER IX

THE BOOKSELLER

For many of us the word "bookseller" immediately suggests the adjective "old." This is highly misleading, for the successful bookseller of to-day is young and sprightly, in mind if not in body. But bookselling itself is one of the ancient professions, going back in history as far as the beginning of the private library, which is itself several thousands of years old. As I have pointed out, the early history of bookselling and book publishing, and of printing as well, is cut from the same piece of cloth. Books were undoubtedly sold in ancient Egypt, probably by persons who owned or hired the slaves who manufactured them. Much the same system was followed in ancient Greece and in Rome.

Henry Curwen, in his "History of Booksellers," remarks that the publishers under the Roman Empire "issued books at least as good and, paradoxical as it may seem, at least as cheaply as their modern brethren." This statement was made in 1873, since which time the average price of books certainly has not declined. So active were the Roman publishers — Atticus, Tryphon, Doris, and others — that Martial was led to boast, "Every one has me in his pocket, every one has me in his hands." His epigrams sold for five denarii, which may represent a modern purchasing power of a dollar and a half; but a cheaper edition was got out for about half that price. During the so-called Dark Ages the monks who made and owned most of the books in existence seem to have bartered among themselves.

But booksellers sprang up with the growth of cities. Paris had so many "stationarii" in 1275 that laws were

passed for their governance — one of which, the stipulation that they should not charge more than one or two per cent for the sale of a book, would delight the heart of a modern publisher. In 1292, according to Curwen, the bookselling corporation of Paris gave employment to twenty-four copyists, seventeen binders, nineteen parchment-makers, thirteen illuminators, and seventeen dealers in manuscripts — real booksellers, these last. In London "stationers or text-writers, who wrote and sold all sorts of books" were to be found abundantly at least as early as 1403.

Printing naturally gave a great fillip to the business and radically altered its character. In England and Scotland there were, between 1474 and 1600, some three hundred and fifty printers and booksellers of record. In the seventeenth century the great booksellers, who were also publishers, made their appearance; and in the eighteenth century they flourished exceedingly. Jacob Tonson, who published Dryden's works; Bernard Lintot; Thomas Guy; Samuel Richardson, the novelist; and Robert Dodsley, an ex-footman, who published and sold, in company with others, Johnson's "Dictionary" and his "Lives of the Poets," retailed books and also had much the position of the influential publishers of to-day. James Lackington, who advertised his as "the cheapest bookshop in the world," John Bell, and others started the campaign for cheaper books, of which the end is not yet in sight. Remainder sales were held in England in the first part of the eighteenth century. For a time the practice of the booksellers was to buy up books cheaply at these sales, destroy half or even two thirds of them, and then, with the supply thus restricted, dispose of the "remainders" at the original price. Lackington refused to do this. Instead, he cut prices a half or more and boasted that he had sold "many hundred thousand volumes." His shop was certainly a busy place, not

only for its time, but probably for any time. Some booksellers had circulating libraries at a very early period. Saint Pamphilius is said to have operated a religious one at Cæsarea in A.D. 309, with thirty thousand volumes. The Scottish poet, Allan Ramsay, established one in Edinburgh about 1725, and a decade or so later London had one.

The anecdotal side of bookselling is intensely interesting, but we cannot stop to browse. However, the lives of the old booksellers reveal certain facts which have a bearing on the situation in the United States in this fourth decade of the twentieth century. Our bookselling tradition is plainly derived from the English system, however related it may be in a more distant way with those of medieval France, Germany, and Italy and ancient Rome, Greece, and Egypt. It has been greatly affected by the fact that for a long time bookselling was so closely associated with publishing. It has long been one of the most dignified forms of retail selling. This air of dignity has been one of its great attractions, but I suspect that in the modern age it is also one of its greatest economic disadvantages.

Successful bookselling demands a knowledge of books. Especially is this true if by success we mean that the bookstore is to be an educational influence as well as a money-making enterprise. But bookselling also demands a familiarity with that highly specialized species of book in which accounts are kept. The bookseller ought to be a good business man. To be such in this generation he must change the cut of his coat. The old-fashioned bookstore was a charming place, but charm alone will not solve the problem of modern book distribution. The booklover will always need a place to browse — to turn over the fresh leaves of new books and taste their contents, to rediscover old books and tenderly blow the dust from them. But the booklover, in the sense of the word which I have in mind, belongs to a tribe that can never be numerous.

It may be as well that he will not, for if he were in the majority the work of the world might never get done. Hard though it may be to face the fact, the bookstore of to-day cannot be primarily a place for those who revere books as things-in-themselves. That is to say, it cannot if we are thinking of the bookstore as a generic term for a book-distributing organization. The bookseller can no longer be satisfied when he has set up a shop which persons who already love books will like to visit. It is because he has been inclined to limit himself to that small group that his profession has fallen behind the times. He has catered to an aristocracy of taste. But the day has arrived when the making and distributing of books must be judged by its effects in producing a democracy of taste.

I shall not assume that the newer type of bookselling necessarily raises the standard of taste, nor that enough has been accomplished when a plentiful supply of printed paper bound in cloth covers and technically definable as books has been set down beside every thoroughfare and at every street corner. Modern business shows a certain indifference as to the quality of the tastes to which it ministers. If mediocre products are demanded, it will furnish them. If beautiful things are demanded, it will furnish them, also. It reflects rather than guides — I say this with full knowledge of the tremendous and even dreadful effect of some of our advertising. The publisher and bookseller are anxious to give the public what it wants. They will give it the best the human intellect and imagination have to offer if it will accept them — and pay for them. The burden of making it want the best rests upon the schools, the colleges, the libraries, and the parents of the country. It, therefore, seems to me that the creation of machinery for the wide dissemination of books may be accepted cheerfully as a step forward, and that we need not be unduly discouraged if the outstanding activities in

this field are those of men with at least one eye on the cash register. A well-organized system of book distribution is like a well-organized radio station — it will carry to thousands or hundreds of thousands of people whatever is put into it. It is a means of communication which will be ready whenever there is something essential to communicate, because of the very fact that it is also ready when there is nothing essential.

The old-fashioned bookstore merits no such comparison. Speaking in purely economic terms, it has failed. Here and there, indeed, it continues to exist and in a modest way to flourish. One would not want its numbers to diminish; one mourns every such bookstore that passes. Nevertheless, it *is* a survival and not truly expressive of the spirit of our generation. Because it could not or would not seek aggressively for business, it has become a side eddy. Or, if it has modernized itself, it has lost something of its old atmosphere, just as a country road does when it is paved, widened, and stripped of its elms and maples. A few bookstores have managed even this miracle and retained much of the aroma of the old tradition. But they are few indeed. The eminent politician who remarked, "Now, where in hell would I go to buy a book?" must have been looking for one of them. Estimates of their number vary with the strictness with which they are defined. Perhaps there are a dozen in the United States, perhaps two dozen. One, in Boston, does one per cent of all the retail book business in the United States, exclusive of textbooks. It is directly descended from a bookstore founded more than a century ago. So excellent a sample is it of the bookstore at its best that I shall borrow a description of it quoted by Dorothea Lawrence Mann:

> Here came Rufus Choate to explain the hieroglyphic memoranda in which he set down the names of the books he wanted to come by the next "boat," as he always called a steamship.

Here came Holmes to say how he loved to practice medicine and teach anatomy, and how his one difficulty was not to pour out from his stores of knowledge faster than his pupils could absorb. Here Thackeray towered above his admirers and told gayly of his American experiences and impressions, none the less amusing because the point of his story was made against his own simplicity or ignorance. . . . Here Whittier's "thee" and "thou" greeted his friends shyly and tenderly. Here were seen the burly figure of Henry Ward Beecher and the slender form of his gentle-mannered sister, Mrs. Stowe, the sweet, kindly face of Lucy Larcom, the spiritual countenance of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the round, rosy, beardless, boyish face of Thomas Starr King. It was not only authors who were the bright lights of the "Corner" in those days [Miss Mann goes on], but the great figures of the stage, university professors, ministers and orators, while John Leitche, one of the great Cunard captains, passed most of his Boston stays reading away for dear life on a square, green-topped stool in a front corner of the store.

New York's best-known bookstore is not so old as the Old Corner Bookstore, for it is only in its eighth decade. It grew out of a news-stand opened by August Brentano in 1853. Bryant, Stoddard, Richard Watson Gilder, Brander Matthews, William Dean Howells, H. C. Bunner, Alice and Phœbe Cary, Lowell and General Grant are described as among its frequent visitors, and Augustin Daly declared that he "browsed there in the atmosphere of plots" when he had a new play in preparation. There are other stores, some almost as old, some of recent origin, which have succeeded in preserving some of this fascinating literary quality — though probably we do not hold our leading literary figures in such awe as our parents and grandparents used to. But there are not enough such stores to be any longer decisive factors in the distribution of books.

Let us turn from such idyllic scenes to glance at the cold

facts of the actually existing retail book trade. We have already followed the author's manuscript through the hands of the publisher, the subscription and direct mail houses, the reprint and cheap edition firms, the book clubs and the jobbers. Let us see what outlets books have for ordinary retail sales. Our inspection will have to be a rapid one, for it must cover a great deal of territory. In discussing books statistically we immediately run into difficulties. Almost all bookstores carry other stock than books — stationery, magazines, chinaware, toys, and so on — and on and on. Sometimes it is the books that are the side line, not the other commodities, and it is hard to tell just when a bookstore becomes a bookstore or ceases to be one. Then there are the outlets which do not pretend to be bookstores, but which do carry books — the drug-stores, cigar-stores, news-stands, and so on, with which we are already familiar. Book departments in department stores do a larger business than any but the very largest bookstores, though in some cases the books are sold at a loss in order to attract trade.

The actual number of book outlets in the United States is not easy to determine. Some 5662 booksellers are recognized in the latest American Book Trade Directory available at this writing. The National Association of Book Publishers had in 1929 a mailing list of 3821 names, representing retailers who sold books to a greater or less extent and who made some use of its publicity material. I have mentioned the fact that a single reprint house has eight thousand active accounts. But when we talk of book outlets in terms of thousands, we include a vast majority of retailers for whom books are a side line, in many cases an unimportant one. In very few stores is anything like a complete line of books carried. Even the largest cannot carry all the titles printed. The jobbers themselves find difficulty in doing that.

During 1929 the National Association of Book Publishers reported 304 new outlets, of which 146 were regular bookshops and branch bookstores, 10 were departments in department stores, 36 were independent circulating libraries, 108 were book departments in gift-shops, drug-stores, and the like, and 4 were mail-order businesses. Most of these outlets were small. The average initial stock of half of them was under $1300. Some of the circulating libraries started with a stock costing as low as $200. Perhaps the most encouraging feature of the Association's reports is that so many new bookstores survive; 81 per cent of those reported in 1925 were still in business at the end of 1929. But there is no lack of room for a large expansion of retail bookselling. Several years ago it was estimated that half the population of the country had no access to bookstores. This appalling total may have diminished by a perceptible fraction, but there is no evidence that as yet it has been much more than nibbled at.

There are certain marked trends in the retail selling of books. One is the practice, not peculiar to bookstores, of buying from hand to mouth. Publishers complain that stores which used to buy, let us say, a hundred copies of a book which was being pushed, are now likely to speculate on twenty-five, trusting to publisher or jobber to rush through an additional order if the demand justifies it. The bookseller contends that the number of titles has grown so large that he cannot stock even a limited list of representative books unless he holds down his individual orders in this way. So harassed is he by the almost hopeless attempt to keep up with current books that he is less and less disposed to keep a full stock of the standard books on which publishers once used to lean heavily. As the average life of the average book declines, he must get books in and out of his store in quick order if he is to prosper. In most cases he is not allowed the privilege of ordering on consignment.

Unless a much-touted book falls flat, the publisher will usually not take any copies back, except as a special dispensation, granted out of sheer benevolence.

Consequently the retailer has grown gun-shy. His margin of profit, though it may be fairly large on the individual book, is not excessive after he has deducted the high costs of doing business. He is tempted to push expensive books because he makes more on each sale, and he is generally in favor of a high price rather than a low one, even when the publisher might be willing to gamble on a low price and a large sale. At best his takings from his community cannot be counted upon to exceed $1 or $1.50 per capita per annum. That is, according to the National Association of Book Publishers, a town of 20,000 population will support a book business of $30,000, which with good management will yield a salary of $3000 for the proprietor, plus a net profit of 5 per cent. This means, of course, that few towns of less than 20,000 can have a real bookstore, as bookstores are at present conducted, and that even in towns considerably larger than this the bookseller cannot count on more than a modest living.

An aggressive retailer will expand his patronage and possible profits by annexing suburban and rural territory. He may thus manage to thrive in a small community. But aggressive retailers usually look for larger fields. The fact is that bookselling in the towns and cities where it is most needed demands patience and the sacrificial spirit. I do not believe that this ought to be the case or that there are any resulting benefits, except possibly to the bookseller's soul. But as matters stand, the book merchant must count as part of his profits the satisfaction of handling a commodity every one respects though few buy. He cannot expect the worldly rewards of his neighbor who sells automobiles, dry goods, or legal opinions. He is charged for the privilege of being looked up to.

Yet, though his plight is often one which invites sympathy, he can often flourish in a modest way if he applies to the selling of books the same degree of salesmanship that is employed in other fields. The enterprising modern bookseller gives much attention to window displays, in order to catch the fickle notice of the passing crowd. He puts a circulating library near the back of the store, so that patrons will have to walk past the sales tables and shelves to reach it. Usually he advertises in the local newspapers. He keeps a card catalogue of his customers, listing on each card the books each has bought, the number and ages of the family, and anything else that will give him a hint as to what kind of books can be sold to a given person. He uses the mails and the telephones to bring new books to the attention of selected customers. He may organize his own "book-of-the-month club," as a Chicago bookseller did, or send out a "book wagon," as a Baltimore bookseller did. Some booksellers have well-organized mail-order departments. New York's largest shop had in 1929 a mail-order list of 80,000 names, to which it was continually adding. The business apparently did not yield large profits, but it did have a prestige value. The larger stores often get out circulars of their own as well as making use of the familiar book-review publications.

Like the publishers the booksellers have to adapt themselves to the seasons of the bookselling year. The peak comes in December when, as Frederick G. Melcher has estimated, as much as one fourth of the whole year's business may be done. The business would certainly be healthier if the sales could be spread out more smoothly over the entire year, and good booksellers always try to stimulate trade in the otherwise dull months. But though sales can be prodded along through late spring and summer, the rush does not begin until September. I suppose this can mean nothing else than that the bookstores have two sorts

of customers — one who really have the bookbuying habit and one who buy only on special occasions. To convert the second class into the first is the booksellers' problem.

The old-fashioned grocery store is giving way to the chain store. Will the independent bookstore be superseded by the chain bookstore? In recent years there has been some experimentation with small bookstore chains as well as with chains of lending libraries. During 1929 some forty-one new branch stores were opened by existing established bookstores. One large publisher owns a number of branch bookstores. Some of these stores, in turn, put lending libraries into cigar-stores, drug-stores, and so on. But there are no indications whatever of the development of anything like a national chain or chains of retail book outlets. More probably the existing chain stores may take on books as part of their regular stock. Books may be bought at the present time in about seventy-five stores owned by a Chicago mail-order house which recently expanded. So far the lists have been confined to popular copyrights, children's books, and dictionaries. Recent trade books have been excluded to avoid antagonizing the booksellers.

But the possibilities of book sales through chain stores, if they are ever vigorously pushed, are by no means small. At the end of 1929 there were forty-nine important chains, engaged in various lines of business. During the first nine months of 1929, before the collapse of the stock market, these chains did a total business of more than two billion dollars — an increase of more than $400,000,000 over the total for the corresponding period of 1928. The company which headed the list, Sears, Roebuck, did a business of a little less than $300,000,000, two others did more than $200,000,000, and five others did more than $100,000,000. Book stocks in these stores would be available to a large fraction of the shopping public — an increasingly

large fraction if the chain stores fulfill their promise of growth. It must be admitted that chain-store books would probably be limited in scope and number. The stores would have to meet unsophisticated tastes in reading just as they do in the matter of breakfast foods or shirts. They would have to sell a good deal of trash, but they could afford to carry outstanding serious books in the trade and reprint editions. They would be feeders to the general bookstores rather than competitors, provided the booksellers realized the opportunity. For it ought to be clear by this time that the book trade should not be considered as competition for a rigidly limited market, but rather as the exploration and extension of a market which is now absurdly small, but which may be almost indefinitely expanded. Any factor which turns an individual who does not habitually read books into one who habitually does read books, no matter of what kind, is probably a good influence, not only for the general book trade, but for the trade in the very best kind of books.

Although the lending library is frequently associated with bookstores, it is a distinct business in itself. The first question to be asked about it, perhaps, is whether it is a competitor of bookselling. The fact that most booksellers have found it worth while to set up lending libraries in their shops may be a sufficient answer. If these libraries hurt sales, it is probably those of cheap books and reprint books that are affected. And we have already seen that the reprint houses are doing nicely. It seems likely that out of a given number of persons who enter a bookstore to rent a book, a certain percentage will become purchasers. Certainly the growth of the rental libraries has caused no slackening in the slow but even increase in bookstore sales.

The rental library, as a rule, has to confine itself to the latest books. It succeeds by riding the crest of the wave of popularity. It cannot keep Marcus Aurelius or

Swinburne on its shelves in the expectation that now and then some one will want to read them. Its books must continually earn their keep, just as must the clerks who handle them. The renting business must be run like any other business, with strict attention to every penny and even fraction of a penny. The conditions under which it operates make chains profitable. New York's most successful system of renting libraries grew until it included, at this writing, seventy-two branches in fourteen cities. The Publishers' Association lists thirty-four rental chains. One Massachusetts chain has three hundred branches; another in the same State has one hundred and fifty; a New York system, not the one just mentioned, has two hundred. The importance of these libraries cannot be calculated by the number of branches. It is the volume of business that is done that counts, and unfortunately figures on this point are not easy to secure. The most reliable estimate of the present place of the rental business in the American book trade is that it now buys about eight per cent of the general trade books sold in the United States. Five years ago, it is stated, the proportion was about one half of one per cent — this, though as we have seen the idea of renting books is perhaps two thousand years old. Mudie's famous English rental library was established as far back as 1842, and it is estimated that possibly sixty per cent of the total English book trade is represented in sales to such libraries.

In this country rental libraries go back to about the beginning of the century. But it was not until very recently that the business was organized in a modern manner. The same informant who gave me the estimates I have already quoted believes that the eight per cent now bought by American rental libraries may go up within the next five years to as high as twenty per cent. In that case the rental library may begin to constitute a problem for the publisher and author, as it does in Great Britain. In Great Britain,

it is pretty generally agreed, the renting habit has seriously interfered with the growth of the buying habit. But this crisis is a long way off in the United States. The higher average income of the American reader is an important differential in favor of the American book distributor. Moreover, the slow progress of book sales in Great Britain may be due just as much to a poor system of selling as to the competition of the renting libraries. The wise book merchandiser will use the rental library and take advantage of the reading habit thus developed. He will encourage any innovation which makes the public book-conscious, whether or not it is immediately productive of sales.

A writer in "The Publishers' Weekly" has interestingly described the methods of one of our most prosperous rental chains.

> All book orders [he says] are placed by central headquarters with the publishers, and the quantity is determined by one buyer who has the consensus of all stores and not just one locality. He also sorts out the obvious plugs through an author record card and from the comments of the advance readers. First orders are comparatively small, only sufficient to cover distribution to all stores in quantities that will meet the first few weeks' demand. Larger orders are given just as quickly as the public demand justifies them. The various branch managers are thus relieved of the responsibility of making requisitions in advance of publication.

Books in all branches of this chain are carefully checked at the end of each day's business, and at the central office the titles in the entire system and the demand for each are known. Books no longer in demand are sorted out, to be sold at second-hand, or those not asked for at one library are sent to another where there is still a call for them. The kind of books in favor varies with different cities and with different parts of the same city. Thus in New York,

Madison Avenue demands a more serious type of book than does upper Broadway. In general, it must be admitted, the patrons of rental libraries read primarily for amusement. An average rental library stock will include the books of the moment, no matter what their character, but the rank and file are likely to be light fiction.

The libraries do not create the demand which they meet, nor in most cases do they do anything whatever to influence it. They are business enterprises, figuring their costs carefully and never when it can be avoided handling any book at a loss. In recent years the standard minimum rental price has gone up. It now amounts to approximately ten per cent of the retail price of the book in the best libraries, though some still operate on a charge of three cents a day with a ten-cent minimum. If a book is rented ten times at ten per cent of its retail price, it has in effect been sold, and if it is rented more times than that or can be sold second-hand, the extra cost of the additional handlings is more than recovered.

The expansion of rental chains outside the larger cities presents some interesting problems and some tempting opportunities. It is practicable under good management to maintain such libraries in communities which cannot support bookstores. A bookseller in Altoona, a railroad-shop town in western Pennsylvania, starting out a few years ago with a little capital and a large amount of enthusiasm, has opened branch libraries, at this writing, in about twenty-five near-by communities. Few, perhaps none, of these towns, outside Altoona, had had bookstores. The bookseller studied his problem carefully. He found that one hundred books for each one thousand of population was a good ratio, so that the stock varied, at the time I visited him, from nine thousand for Altoona to three hundred and fifty for Mount Union. But because the libraries were part of a chain, the renter in Mount Union had as wide a choice

as the one in Altoona. He could ask for any book in the entire system and it would be delivered without delay.

The choice of stores in which to place the branch libraries was made after a careful survey of location, business done, and character. The population was studied, also, both before and after the branch was opened. The communities varied greatly in their tastes. Hollidaysburg was fond of "Westerns," Lock Haven was chilly toward them. Race, employment, sex, income, amount of leisure, were all found, naturally enough, to affect the choices made. So did the seasons. There was a "winter high," when travel was difficult and people were shut in a good deal; a "summer low," beginning with the spring cleaning — which is no joke in western Pennsylvania; a rise as the college students came home for their vacations in June and July; a normal continuation of this rise among the stay-at-homes in the fall; and finally a drop during the Christmas holidays, when many books are bought, but most people are too busy to read.

A very careful accounting system was maintained, on two sets of cards, so that the record of each book and of each patron was always known. The life of a book in the library was about a year, during which time it usually earned a profit. At the end of its period of usefulness it was put into a bargain sale, which always attracted a flood of customers. Window displays and occasional newspaper advertisements were used to drum up trade, especially when a new branch was opened. Proprietors of stores in which branches were placed received one third of the gross rentals — a rate which is a little higher than is common in rental chains.

Obviously the libraries had to give their public what it wanted rather than what the proprietor thought good for it. About half the titles were fiction of the popular sort, of no particular educational value except as they

formed a reading habit among people who otherwise would not have read books at all. Another thirty per cent was fiction of a higher grade, including the very best. A few classics, going as far back as Dickens and Scott, were kept on hand — an almost unique practice among rental libraries. About twenty per cent of the stock was non-fiction. This, except in the cases of popular biographies, is less profitable than fiction, though the proprietor took great pride in handling it. He had on hand, for example, Beveridge's "Life of Lincoln," which, at a retail price of $12.50, was a long time in earning a profit. His list of most popular authors was curiously diversified; it included not only Ruby M. Ayres and Temple Bailey, but also John Galsworthy, Louis Bromfield, and Frank Swinnerton. "Death Comes for the Archbishop," "The Green Murder Case," "Strange Interlude," "Mother India," and Ludwig's "Napoleon" all were or had been "three-star books." By studying individual cards the proprietor was able to ascertain that in many instances patrons did "read their way up." He believed that the only way to improve his customers' tastes was to feed them the lighter sort of books until they grew tired of them and demanded something more substantial.

Not all lending-library proprietors would be as genuinely interested in the cultural values of their business as this man is. Nevertheless, if one is interested in what may fairly be regarded as educational work there is perhaps a greater opportunity for the lending library than for the old-fashioned bookstore. In this instance there was no competition between the lending and the selling of books, since prior to the establishment of the lending-library branches the only way to buy books was to come into Altoona or some other of the larger cities or to order them from an agent or by mail.

A specialized form of the renting library is that which

is adapted to the uses of college and university communities. A number of such institutions, as a writer in "The Publishers' Weekly" states, have set up such libraries to meet the needs of required reading for students. These services somewhat resemble the "pay shelves" of ordinary city libraries. The University of Chicago, which established a rental library some seventeen or eighteen years ago, had at last reports some forty-two thousand volumes for this purpose, which were kept in the University Bookstore. The University of California also has a rental system. Incidentally the college bookstore has become increasingly important of late years. But the college student is already more thoroughly exposed to books than any other section of our population. If he or she does not read, it is because higher education is at fault, not the system of book distribution.

Rental libraries will always attract readers who are looking for diversion rather than for enlightenment. The newest book will always be at a premium. One rental librarian states that customers always pick out the book with the newest and cleanest wrapper, and she artfully prolongs the renting life of her books by removing the wrapper and putting it carefully aside when a book is issued, replacing it when the volume is returned. The rental library is the newspaper of book distribution. It must minister to the craving for novelty. That, at least, is the case so far as rental library experience has gone. It might be interesting to try the experiment of a rental selection which would include expensive standard books — history, biography, the arts, the sciences. But such libraries would trespass on a field which by common consent has so far been reserved for the free public library. If a community could afford a renting library of such books, it could just as well afford a good public library.

Whether or not the rental library grows to a point

where it will use twenty per cent of all trade books, or a little less or a little more, it is certain to grow. The tendency of retail selling — and book-renting is in reality a form of selling — is toward amalgamation. One man with whom I talked dreamed of a trans-continental chain of renting libraries, each giving service not only to its own community but to the traveling public. A patron going west could borrow a book in Philadelphia, return it in Cleveland, borrow another in Cleveland, return it in Omaha, borrow another in Omaha and return it in San Francisco. Such a chain might assume proportions which would enable it to publish books on its own account. It might dominate the book trade in a manner that would make the book clubs seem insignificant. The possibility is perhaps alarming. The specter of literary standardization raises its frightful visage behind every such scheme. But I think I shall stick to my previous contention that any kind of experimentation which looks toward the wider distribution of books is to be welcomed. There is less danger that Americans will read the wrong kinds of books than that they will read none at all.

CHAPTER X

HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES GREW

I HAVE spoken of the public library in an earlier chapter as an integral part of the "book trade" and have pointed out that it still has a long way to go before it will reach the limits of its "market." I have also called attention to the melancholy findings of a committee of the American Library Association which some years ago inquired into public-library facilities. At that time the libraries of the United States had only six tenths of a book per capita, circulated only two books per capita per annum, spent only thirty-two cents per capita, and reached only fifty-six per cent of the total population and seventeen per cent of the rural population. Conditions have improved since the survey was made, but they have not altered beyond recognition.

One can, however, be optimistic about library facilities if one realizes how far the public library has already come. It has come a long way in a relatively short time. The writer recalls two types of public or semi-public libraries prevalent in his native State of Vermont twenty-five or thirty years ago. One of them consisted of a stock of books owned by a society to which any one could be admitted on paying a small initiation fee. At stated intervals this society met and the books were auctioned off to prospective readers for use until the next meeting. The newest and most desirable books naturally commanded the highest prices. The money thus taken in, less the infinitesimal amount needed to pay running expenses, was used to buy more books.

The other type of library was lodged in a small up-

stairs room, was free to any resident of the little town, and was open on one or two afternoons of each week. An agreeable married woman, whose children had grown beyond the point where they required continuous supervision, acted as volunteer librarian. Perhaps she received a few dollars a year for her labors. This library contained most of the standard classics, many of them donated, and was able to buy sparingly of new books — most of them from the best-seller lists. The community was a fairly bookish one. No "publicity" was necessary in order to give the librarian two busy afternoons each week. But, of course, this was not an aggressive educational organization, reaching out for new "customers," as the modern type of small-town library often is and as the city library almost always is. It had somewhat of the air of a community club. Though the community was a simple one, those below a certain social or economic level might have felt a little ill at ease.

I still think of this modest little library most affectionately, and I like to think of it as representing something that goes far back into human history. If we go back to its beginnings we hear the bells of immemorial temples, the splashing of fountains in priestly courtyards, and the murmur of ancient incantations; we see the flaring lights of torches or the shafts of the Egyptian or Mesopotamian sun striking through arches and between columns upon tablets of clay covered with cuneiform inscriptions, and at an endlessly later date upon rolls of papyrus. Priests and acolytes and monks were the chief custodians of learning. Reading and writing were among the mysteries, if not positively miracles, and religion was the third "R." This was a tradition that was long in dying. Even in literate New England in the late nineteenth century the village boy, wishing to follow his studies beyond the common-school stage, and not having a well-stocked public library, or any

library at all, at his disposal, turned naturally to the minister of his church — that mild, frock-coated successor to the robed and awful priests of one or two hundred years ago.

I would not feel competent to write a history of libraries, even though there were space for it in a small volume devoted mostly to other matters. Yet it is impossible to think of libraries in true perspective without having their long past a little in mind. The Hittites, at a time contemporary with the fall of Troy, possessed at least one library of twenty thousand tablets. Every city in ancient Chaldea is said to have had its library. At Nineveh, Layard found remnants of one of ten thousand "volumes." The Egyptians had their well-established libraries long before the day of Tut-ankh-amen. Mr. Frederick W. Jenkins has mentioned the fact that a certain official whose tomb was found at Gizeh, and who died some five thousand years ago, was described in the mortuary inscription as "Controller of the Library."

The great libraries of Alexandria may have numbered more than half a million rolls — though a roll was perhaps no more than one sixteenth the substance of a modern book — by the third century before Christ. "As early as the fifth century before Christ," to quote Mr. Jenkins again, "Greece had a lively book trade." The library at Pergamon in Asia Minor is said to have had two hundred thousand rolls, and the story goes that the infatuated Anthony sent its contents to Cleopatra as a token of his ill-omened esteem. Rome had not only its publishers and book-sellers in the first century of our era, but also its public library. By the fourth century it is believed to have had twenty-eight such libraries, in addition to many large private ones. It may have had a "book wagon." At least no one can prove that it did not. Slave labor was used to make copies, in place of the modern printers

and binders, but books were so costly as to be an evidence of conspicuous wealth. Seneca speaks bitingly of the newly rich, whose books were "got together to adorn and beautify a wall."

When learning declined and writing was done rather with swords and battle-axes than with pens, books survived in monasteries and in kings' palaces in the Eastern Empire, in Arabia, and in many parts of the dark continent of Europe. There were a few notable collectors, such as Pope Sylvester II, whom we find writing to a friend about the year 1000: "I am eagerly collecting a library; and as formerly at Rome and elsewhere in Italy, so likewise in Germany and Belgium, I have obtained copyists and manuscripts, with a mass of money and the help of friends in those parts. Permit me to beg of you also to promote this end. We will append at the end of this letter a list of those writers we wish copied." The Benedictines, the Augustinians, and the Dominicans were all great collectors of books. It was a custom in many monasteries for a clerk to read aloud during meals, when there was supposed to be no conversation.

With the invention of printing, about the middle of the fifteenth century, books became cheaper and libraries more common. Several of the great existing collections — notably the Vatican and the Bibliotèque Nationale in Paris — antedate the invention of printing. The British Museum, which stands next in importance to the Bibliotèque Nationale, is of comparatively modern origin, for it was not established until 1753. The libraries at Oxford and Cambridge are of respectable antiquity, as are those of the University of Edinburgh, the State Library at Munich, the library at the University of Basle, the Library of Saint Mark in Venice, the Biblioteca Estense at Modena, and the Jagiellonska Library at Cracow. If we wish to go as far as China, we find libraries even more ancient; and the

first catalogue of Chinese books was issued nineteen centuries ago.

But there is one distinction to be made between nearly all libraries, in all countries, up to about fifty years ago, and the modern public library. The early libraries were collections of books, just as a museum is a collection of pictures, stuffed animals or fossils. They were primarily safe places where books could be preserved and only incidentally places where books could be used. The twentieth-century library in America is no longer a museum. It is less and less important as a place where books are preserved, more and more important as a place where they are used, worn out, and replaced. Let us trace the growth of this idea in America.

It is recalled that Captain Myles Standish found time to read, for he had a private library of some fifty volumes. Elder William Brewster, one of the early settlers of Plymouth, is said to have had a large library for his time — larger, no doubt, than the worthy captain's. Captain Robert Keayne established what seems to have been a public library in the Boston Town House in 1653. The Reverend John Harvard had already immortalized his name, in 1638, only eighteen years after the landing of the Pilgrims and only eight years after the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, by presenting his personal library to the infant university at Cambridge. This was not, of course, a public library. It was part of an institution which was intended to keep up the supply of reverend gentlemen after John Harvard and his contemporaries had passed on.

But it was the Reverend Doctor Thomas Bray, founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, who did most to promote bookishness in the Colonies in those rough days. Dr. Bray conceived the idea of distributing godly and improving books among the settlers. "To Mary-

land alone," says Dr. Arthur E. Bostwick in "The American Public Library," "Dr. Bray sent thirty parish libraries, embracing 2545 books. . . . In a pamphlet issued in London in 1697 he announced his intention of extending his scheme 'for the supply of all the English colonies in America therewith.' In 1698 one of Dr. Bray's libraries was placed in New York for Trinity Parish. Although these libraries were primarily for the use of the clergy, they were open to the public and seem to have antedated the town libraries of New England by more than a century." Bray is said to have distributed altogether some thirty-four thousand volumes.

About a generation after Bray began his labors in America, Benjamin Franklin made an effort to start a rather different sort of library in Philadelphia. After a year this library failed and the books were distributed among the members. Not at all discouraged, Franklin founded, in 1731 or 1732, the Philadelphia Library Company. Its beginnings were humble. "I was not able," wrote Franklin in his "Autobiography," "to find more than fifty persons, mostly young tradesmen, willing to pay down for this purpose forty shillings each and ten shillings per annum." The commercial circulating library, already established in England, spread to America, and about this time, or a little later, booksellers in America were renting books to their customers for a flat payment of twenty-eight shillings per annum. But the library idea grew very slowly in the country, and so, consequently, did the libraries. It has been estimated that at the end of the eighteenth century there were in America something more than thirty libraries, with a total stock of eighty thousand volumes. This was about one seventieth of a volume per capita, by which we see that the six tenths of a volume which we have to-day does represent progress.

Early in the century there was an increase in the interest

in books. Between 1800 and 1825, 179 libraries of all kinds are said to have been established. These included the mercantile libraries of New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, a type which spread and has survived to the present day. They were not free, but their benefits were available for a small annual fee, as is still usually the case. The second quarter of the century produced 551 new libraries. These were often simple in the extreme. Doubtless there were many untabulated libraries such as the one Andrew Carnegie described.

When I was a working boy in Pittsburgh [Mr. Carnegie wrote in his "Autobiography"], Colonel Anderson of Allegheny — a name that I can never speak without feelings of devotional gratitude — opened his little library of four hundred books to boys. Every Saturday afternoon he was in attendance at his house to exchange books. No one but him who has felt it can ever know the intense longing with which the arrival of Saturday was awaited, that a new book might be had. My brother and Mr. Phipps, who have been my principal business partners through life, shared with me Colonel Anderson's precious generosity, and it was when revelling in the treasures which he opened up to us that I resolved, if ever wealth came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man.

How splendidly Mr. Carnegie kept his resolution is now a matter of history. But it was a long time before the modern conception of a free public library, open to all and with a miscellaneous collection of books for general circulation, gained acceptance. One of the first to state this conception was George Ticknor, who declared, in 1851, when a new public library for Boston was being discussed:

I would establish a library which differs from all free libraries yet attempted; I mean one in which any popular book tending

to moral and intellectual improvement shall be furnished in such numbers of copies that many persons can be reading the same book at the same time; in short, that not only the best books of all sorts, but the pleasant literature of the day shall be made accessible to the whole people when they most care for it, that is, when it is fresh and new.

This generous view had its effect then and later on the policy of one of America's foremost public libraries. The Boston Public Library, authorized by the Massachusetts General Court in 1848, was actually established in 1854, with an annual appropriation from the city of five thousand dollars. This was probably the third library in the United States to be supported wholly or partly from taxation. The first is thought to have been one at Salisbury, Connecticut, which was founded in 1833. The quarter-century after 1850 saw many laws legalizing aid of this sort, and during that period the amazing total of 22,040 public libraries came into existence. It must have seemed at the time that every American would soon be spending all his leisure hours with his nose buried in a book. The expectation was premature, to say the least.

Library work as an art, a science, or even a trade was late in being recognized. The awkward hand of the amateur lay over most of the smaller institutions. A friend of the writer remembers going to a small library in a Southern city some twenty-five or thirty years ago. He was looking for material bearing on a special line of research which he was sure a collection in that city would contain. The library had no catalogue and the librarian, who knew where the books were, was unfortunately absent. Her assistant was momentarily at a loss. Then she bethought her of the Negro trusty from the neighboring penitentiary who had been detailed to act as janitor, sweeping the floors and dusting the books when they needed it. The assistant thought the trusty might know where the

desired volumes were — and he did. This illustration may be a little extreme. Nevertheless, this type of librarian and library did exist, and so did the martinet, who correctly believed that the less books were read the longer they would last, and who accordingly put what obstacles he or she could in the reader's path.

Some of the libraries established during the first half of the nineteenth century were county libraries, which gave service to the rural population here and there. I shall discuss them more fully later on, but let us glance at their beginnings. Indiana, as early as 1816, passed a law which stipulated that when new counties were laid out the General Assembly should "cause at least ten per cent to be reserved out of the proceeds of the sale of town lots in the seat of justice of each county, for the use of a public library of such county, and at the same session they shall incorporate a Library Company under such rules and regulations as will best secure its permanence and extend its benefits." The first county library was laid out in Pike County — which, incidentally, must be carefully distinguished from that maligned rural district in Missouri which enriched our language with the word "Piker."

The first Indiana law did not work very well, but in 1852 Indiana was one of the first States to set up township libraries. Michigan established them in 1835; two generations later it followed New York in setting up a system of traveling libraries under a State librarian. But it was not until the end of the nineteenth century or the first decade of the twentieth that rural library service in any form went very far. It obviously has not gone too far, even now, though like most other things which tend to modernize country life in America it is spreading. We shall take a look at it in its place.

American librarians were slow to claim their proper professional standing or realize their common interests.

Their first national conference, attended by about eighty delegates, was held in New York City in September, 1853, and it was there agreed "that this convention be regarded as preliminary to the formation of a permanent librarians' association." It *was* preliminary — by twenty-three years. Not until the Centennial year did the librarians meet again and form the American Library Association. Incidentally, this meeting was so successful and stirred up so much enthusiasm that it led to an international conference of librarians in the following year and to the organization of the Library Association of the United Kingdom. The A.L.A. survived and flourished, and its present-day importance in the extension of the reading of good books is hard to overestimate.

The Association had headquarters from 1906 to 1908 in Boston; since 1909 they have been in Chicago. For many years, though doing much to bring up standards of library work, the Association did not come directly in touch with the general public to any large extent. Its modern rebirth came about when the United States entered the World War and the organization took up the work of providing books for the soldiers and sailors in the camps and bases at home, at sea, and overseas. As a result the United States army probably became the first reading army in history, and half of what it read was non-fiction. The armistice ended the emergency, but it had taught the lesson that the same men who had been eager to read books while in uniform could be induced to read them after they had put on their civilian store clothes. Consequently the Association as a whole, as well as the more ambitious and better financed of the individual libraries, began to branch out. It can almost be said that the deliberate and sustained effort to "sell" library facilities to the public, along the businesslike lines to which the ultimate consumer has been accustomed by those who have sold him his shaving-

soap and collars, breakfast food and garters, hair tonic, wardrobe trunks, and electric refrigerators, dates from the end of the World War. The aloofness and dignity with which the old-style librarian had wrapped himself began to break down; not universally, but in many conspicuous and successful instances the newer type of librarian began to go out into the market-place and raise his voice so that it could be heard above the clamor of the salesmen and propagandists.

But the ballyhoo — and this is another one of the subjects we shall arrive at in another chapter — though enlivening and necessary under the circumstances, is the least important development in modern librarianship. The librarian now has a professional technique not dreamed of a generation ago. Much of this technique, let me frankly admit, seems hopelessly dull to the outsider, whose conceptions of the huge amount of administrative and clerical work essential to the smooth functioning of a library are extremely hazy. So long as we can find the book we want when we want it, few of us care what system of classification is used. But technique is as necessary to the librarian as to the engineer. It is my impression that the technique of librarianship in the leading libraries is further advanced than that in any other branch of the distribution of books. By this I mean the manner in which the books are actually routed through the library to the consumer — that is to say, the library patron.

Libraries no longer confine themselves to meeting a demand — or one might say that they now meet the demand halfway. They are becoming more and more true educational institutions, stimulating the desire to read and attempting to guide it. This will appear when we drop into some of the typical city libraries. It appears also, needless to say, in the work of the A.L.A. The A.L.A. has contributed to the training of librarians by making surveys

of existing library practice and by publishing textbooks useful in the library schools. It has contributed to the training of readers, which is doubtless even more essential, by articles in newspapers, magazines, and yearbooks, by exhibits, and by the publication of a monthly magazine, "The Booklist." The preparation of book lists, by which the reader may be helped to find his way through the wilderness of thousands of titles, is plainly one of the major subdivisions of the book trade. Almost every one connected with the trade makes a list, from motives and points of view which may be commercial, benevolent, or scientific. If all these lists could be reduced to one list and the publishers convinced of its validity in advance of publication of their books, the number of new titles could be cut from thousands to hundreds, or even scores. Of this, however, there is no immediate danger.

By the work of committees and by votes of librarians the A.L.A. is constantly giving birth to lists — of the month, of special subjects, for special classes of readers. It may recommend about one eighth of the fiction published in a given month. Or it may get out a list of "Readable Books in Many Subjects." It publishes the "Reading-with-a-Purpose" series, brief accounts of selected subjects with appended bibliographies, which are sold in most libraries and are now well along in their second half-million. There are now fifty or more such booklets.

To sum up a little: We found libraries, at the beginning of the historical period, a kind of museum. There existed public libraries in ancient Chaldea, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, but for a long time they were probably more like book warehouses than anything else. Certainly they were not popular, for few could read. Priests, scholars, and lawyers must have been their chief patrons. Such was the library down almost to the present day — an institution of value in the preservation of cultural relics,

but lacking in vitality and aggressiveness. Now it is becoming more and more like a school — more and more, in no invidious sense of the word, a businesslike if not profit-seeking enterprise. For its modest income of thirty-two cents a head throughout the nation — or perhaps somewhat more than that now — it is putting on a good show. It is not a perfect institution nor is it patronized by perfect people. As an inveterate patron of libraries in many cities, I frankly admit that some practices of some of them irritate me and that some of their steadiest patrons seem to me below the level of some I know who never voluntarily read a book through. Public reading-rooms attract the most desirable, and to some extent the least desirable, portions of our population: the civilized human being with a thirst for knowledge or need of inspiration, on the one hand, and on the other, the psychopath and the gentleman of inelegant leisure. But this is perhaps only another way of saying that the library is no longer a cloister, but a battleground between civilizing and de-civilizing influences. I made a somewhat snobbishly disparaging remark to one large city librarian about the character of some of the patrons of his newspaper room. It was a dreary day, with a cold rain falling. He looked out of the window and then back at one particularly unshaven and unwashed reader. "Well," he said reflectively, "if they didn't come here, where else would they go? And if we can't help them, what are we good for?"

CHAPTER XI

SOME CITY LIBRARIES

THE best way to find out about city libraries would be to visit all of them. I doubt that any two would be found in which the methods and the atmosphere were exactly alike. As we cannot visit them all, let us drop in casually at eight which are both important and typical. We shall have to leave out many others which are also important and typical.

I shall search for those particular details in each library which bear upon the development and extension of library service and thus are in line with our general purpose to find out how the "market" for serious books can be widened. Thus I shall pry into such matters as the means employed for getting readers into the library; their guidance after they get there; their numbers and tastes; and the nature of the "plant" which is provided for their diversion and edification. In the end it may be possible to make some generalizations, for though we will not have a complete picture, we will have seen enough to recognize the outstanding trends as well as the principal contradictions and differences of opinion in library procedure.

The New York Public Library, which serves Manhattan, the Bronx, and Richmond — or a total population of something less than 3,000,000 — differs from most large city libraries in the overshadowing importance of its great reference collections, which do not circulate. It has, in its entire system, more than twice as many reference books as circulation books. The result is that the central library, which houses most of the reference collections, does not need to advertise for patrons. They come without

solicitation and in larger droves than can be conveniently served. Three million and more, a number greater than the total population of the three boroughs represented, have been counted by the doormen in a single year, and it is believed that the actual number who came and went is much greater. Consequently there are many days during the peak of the season when it is necessary to put up the "Standing Room Only" sign at the entrance to the main reading-rooms, and steps have had to be taken to discourage the use of such rooms by school children who bring their own books.

Somewhat similar conditions are reported from many of the branches, for New York is a rapidly growing city, and in proportion to its wealth its appropriations for library service have not been over-generous. Where the use of circulation and reference collections has permanently dropped off, it is because the character of a neighborhood has changed from residential to commercial or industrial, or where a racial group which read largely has been crowded out by one less addicted to books. The problem of overcrowding is usually as urgent in the libraries as in the subway. If New York ranks among the least experimental of the great cities in library work, it is because it has to operate under emergency conditions practically all the time.

Because of overcrowding and some architectural peculiarities of the central building, open shelves for reference books have been adopted only to a limited extent. Perhaps, too, the somewhat undisciplined character of the New York library patron, as contrasted with those of most other cities, has had something to do with this restriction. In the mass the New Yorker visiting his central library finds himself involved in an impersonal and somewhat militaristic machine. It is only when he escapes into one of the special reading-rooms that he breathes a more informal and

liberating air. In no case is he coddled or spoiled — there is not time for it, in justice to the thousands who need service. Yet the central library not long ago added to its staff one of those new-fangled officials whom we shall meet nearly everywhere as we visit the large city libraries — a "readers' adviser."

The readers' adviser represents an attempt to relieve the timidity and confusion of a would-be student who happens in and finds himself confronted with perhaps hundreds of thousands of books without knowing precisely how to find the ones he wants — or even what ones he does not. No one adviser, or even a whole flock of advisers, could do justice to the reading problems of the many hundreds of thousands of individuals who drop into the main library each year. To advertise the office would be to swamp it. In this case the adviser sits in an inconspicuously designed room at the end of a corridor and waits, like a patient fisherman, for nibbles. They come with sufficient regularity to keep her busy: a man who says he is forty-two years old and a misfit and wants "some books that will tell me what to do"; a man who asks, "Can I sell? If not, why not?"; a woman who wants to "know the difference between good and bad poetry"; a man who lay awake nights worrying because his children were "coming along" and he was not "keeping up with them"; and a stream of individuals who want work or yearn to tell their miscellaneous troubles to some one. The avowed policy in the New York Public Library is to help the individual to help himself. The adviser does not give out books; she gives out lists. She hopes that after one or two visits the visitor will have learned enough so that he or she will not need to come back. In a large and crowded library no other policy is workable.

The readers' adviser, of course, represents merely a specialized attempt to do for some of the visitors to the

central library what every branch librarian who is not too greatly overworked tries to do with her steady customers in her more intimate environment. Almost every branch librarian is called upon to give advice, not only to book-borrowers, but to those who wish to buy at the bookstores — not to mention those who have something on their mind that may have nothing to do with books. In the branches something of the austerity of the central library is lacking. The branches have exhibitions of paintings, give their rooms for lectures, have story-hours for children, arrange classes in English, and try to meet the needs and interests of the national or racial groups who make up their constituency. One New York branch, in Harlem, has one of the best existing collections of Negro history and literature, and another has a Czecho-Slovakian collection of eleven thousand volumes.

From five to six per cent of the books circulated in the New York system are in foreign tongues, with German and Russian on the increase and Yiddish on the decrease. Approximately six out of every ten are fiction — a proportion which checks well enough with that of the country at large. The circulation department boasts that it doesn't "stuff books down people's throats." Nevertheless, it displays and pushes books that it considers good, and books requested by patrons of the branches are subjected to severe scrutiny, though, if there is what might be called a cultural censorship, it usually consists in ordering a small number of copies rather than in not ordering any. The actual selection of books to be bought is made by staff assistants, a practice common in city libraries. Some of the assistants specialize — one group is made up of authorities on detective stories.

Each branch has a budget for new books, based, with certain exceptions, on the ratio between its total stock and its circulation. The demand for good and serious

books is noticeable — more so, perhaps, than in some solidly "American" communities. Travel has fallen off somewhat, but biography and poetry are going strong, and, as one librarian puts it, the New York library patron "eats up drama." But the New York system is, in the richest city in the world, on short rations. The circulation department was spending, as this was written, about fifty cents per capita per annum — a low figure. At least five branch libraries were needed in one borough, the Bronx, but no money was in sight with which to build them. The last branch to be built from the Carnegie grant had just been completed.

An interesting phase of public-library work anywhere is the seasonal and yearly fluctuation in the demand for books. In New York the circulation from the period from March to June, 1929, for no obvious reason, fell far below that for the same period of 1928. Then, in July, also for no obvious reason, it took a sharp turn upward. The same thing happens in the reference department. In July, the main reading-room on an average day may issue some twenty-five hundred books; in April and December the average may be nearly twice as much; during the last few days of December it may run up to more than sixty-six hundred. But at all times the New York library system is overworked and overcrowded. There is apparently no remedy for this situation except for the city to appropriate enough money to provide libraries worthy of its wealth and its importance as a cultural center.

Massachusetts stands first in volumes per capita in public libraries, though in circulation she has to yield first place to California. One would, therefore, expect much of the Boston Public Library, even though its reference work is supplemented by that of several important private libraries and of a number of educational institutions of high rank.

Nor is one disappointed. The library can boast that it "was the first free city library in the world supported by taxation," and it has been well, though not extravagantly, supported.

Its methods are not sensational — that would not be expected in Boston — but neither are they stamped with an unreasonable conservatism. One may fairly say that its policy has been directed toward a higher quality of reading rather than a larger bulk. The extensive development of circulating libraries, of which there may be from four to five hundred in Greater Boston, has taken some of the load of ephemeral literature off the Public Library's shoulders; and current books are bought with discretion. Unlike New York, Boston has a relatively small reference collection in comparison with its circulating stock. One of the best systems of inter-library loans in the country enables it to get almost any needed book for any reader. Its co-operation with the Baker Library at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, and with other special libraries, helps keep down the need for special collections. All this, together with some other less tangible qualities that seem to be in the air in Boston, makes the library system elastic, informal, and friendly.

The library does not have to drum up readers. It does try to guide them. It co-operates with the Boston Symphony Orchestra by giving lectures, with music, in advance of symphony programmes and printing with the programme a list of pertinent books. So successful has this plan been that the orchestra director exclaimed on one occasion, "you have created a new audience for me." Because the library conceives adult education to be one of its important functions, it publishes a catalogue — the current one running to 146 pages — of "Free Public Lectures and Public Educational Courses" in Greater Boston. It publishes a monthly magazine, "More Books," with critical articles,

reviews of selected books, news notes about the library, and lists of acquisitions. It co-operates with the Board of Trade of Boston Book Merchants in the issuance of "Better Books," an informative quarterly. Some effort has been made to get the library patrons to avail themselves of a readers' advisory service. But this office, though capably filled, has not proved such a satisfactory experiment in Boston as it has in several other cities. The majority of readers either do not want advice or are too diffident to ask for it. Those who do ask are as likely to want help in intimate problems of daily life as in reading. It is flattering to the spirit of a great library that people should bring such questions to it. But that is not precisely what a library is for.

Children's work is made much of in Boston, as it is in all libraries which look to the future, and the circulation of children's books is almost half the total circulation of all departments. Story-telling groups have been formed in all the branches, and children are interested in this fascinating way in books they will later read. Often the library's story-tellers visit the public schools, and there is very close co-operation between library and school. Pictures as well as books are sent out as deposit collections for school use. Besides the thirty or more branches and the school deposits there are library agencies in fire-engine houses and various public institutions. Many books are lent on special cards to persons working in Boston, but living outside the city limits. The open-shelf system makes as many books as possible freely accessible in the main library as well as in the branches and adds a good deal to the friendly, "browsing" atmosphere of the institution.

About one fourth of the books taken out by adult readers are non-fiction. This fact may or may not have any bearing on Boston's reputation as the Athens of America. New York, with about forty per cent of non-fiction, shows more

serious tastes. Juvenile readers divide their reading almost exactly half and half between fiction and non-fiction. School work and a child's natural interest in various practical subjects have much to do with this. The Boston circulation fluctuations do not exactly follow those of New York City, for August is the lowest month, instead of July, and March the highest, instead of December.

The spirit of the library is finely indicated by a paragraph which I take from a report of the Director, Charles F. D. Belden: "A library is not merely a collection of books. It is an organization in which it is the duty of specially appointed persons to help the public to get the desired books or information. This human element is a most important factor in all library administrations. A library may be the richest in its resources and still fail because of the inadequacy of its service." If the Boston Public Library is limited in its trust funds, which amount to only four or five per cent of those of the New York Public Library, it is equally rich in humanity and good-will.

Leaving Boston and New York behind and turning westward, we come upon one of the outstanding American libraries, in a city which has led in most community enterprises — the Cleveland Public Library. Behind this notable institution are nearly eighty years of growth, beginning with a high-school collection of twenty-two hundred books established in 1853. To its present prestige two distinguished librarians have especially contributed — W. H. Brett, who served from 1884 to 1918, and Miss Linda M. Eastman, who took Mr. Brett's place after his death. The new library building, one of the most successful in the country, is an appropriate capstone to what went before. It was not opened, however, until 1925.

A long struggle against overcrowding, with frequent moves from one headquarters to another, emphasized the need for a permanent structure, and this in turn showed the necessity of "selling" the library to the Cleveland public.

It is apparent that two things have to be sold under such circumstances: first, the desirability of a suitable library as a kind of civic monument; second, the uses of such a library to the individual citizen. These two things are not necessarily twins, for a voter might well take pride in a beautiful library building, which could be pointed out to visitors, without recognizing any reason for going inside its doors. But the Cleveland library has ministered to community pride without losing sight of the essential purposes of book collections. Its publicity has been expertly handled, but it has not been all ballyhoo. The campaign to interest the citizen in his library has been accompanied by enlightened efforts to analyze his needs and meet them intelligently.

The library keeps itself before the public in various ways: by frequent radio talks made by members of the staff; by furnishing reading lists in connection with current plays, concerts, and events in the news, as several other city libraries now do; by inviting convention visitors and other strangers in town to visit it; by attractive posters and bulletins put up in front of the building and in other prominent places; by a house organ, "The Open Shelf"; by cultivating the good-will of the metropolitan newspapers and contriving to give them real news; by co-operation with clubs, classes, and discussion groups; and by exhibits and displays, in the library and elsewhere.

The readers' advisory service has perhaps been more intensively developed in Cleveland than anywhere else in the country. This is an innovation which does not run itself, but requires firmness, tact, sympathy, and knowledge of books in about equal proportions. These requirements the Cleveland Library seems to have met admirably. The advisers' experiences with readers are much like those in other libraries, sometimes amusing, sometimes touching, often throwing a new light on the problems of every one connected with the making and distribution of books. In-

deed, no author, publisher, or bookseller would be wasting his time if he were to spend a few days or even weeks watching and listening while the advisers do their work. But he would need an invisible cloak.

The advisers keep cards showing each reader's interests, together with the books recommended and read. In a single year 3172 patrons used the service. Some were referred to division heads, others given the single book necessary to start them in the subject they wanted to pursue, still others furnished with printed lists or lists prepared for their personal needs. Some 161 occupations were represented in a single year, "ranging alphabetically from accountant, actor and air-service man to truck-driver, waitress, and watchmaker." A surgeon asked for special reading for his leisure moments; a man who left school in the grades wanted to make up his supposed cultural deficiencies; a political worker who was more acustomed to doing politics than to reading about them was given Kent's "Great Game of Politics," and after fifteen months of terrific labor triumphantly completed it. Often readers were given volumes from the advisers' special collection; in other cases they were referred to the proper room or division. Another way of keeping in touch with readers are the reading groups, which meet, in winter time, in a cheerful room with an open fire. Book talks and discussions have been tried, but the ever-present cranks and fanatics make them difficult to manage. The library has a notably successful Young People's Room, which is expected to meet the special needs of the adolescent who is neither child nor adult. In connection with this department there has been organized a Poetry Group, which has written and published at least one book of verse.

The library takes pride in having more books on open shelves than any other library in the world. These are arranged by subjects in sixteen reading-rooms, with a

"Popular Room" in which are placed representative books from each of the other divisions. A readers' adviser in the Popular Room is ready to help patrons who have difficulty in finding, or finding out, what they want. There are books in twenty-seven foreign languages, and so well known has this feature of the library become that cases have occurred in which immigrants have come direct from the train to the library before looking for lodgings. There is a minimum of policing throughout the library, and the casual visitor never feels that he is under the suspicious survey he experiences in the New York Public Library and perhaps one or two others. The difference here may lie in the character of the cities rather than in that of the libraries. I am sure the directors of the New York Library would dispense with their guards if they dared. Certainly the Cleveland Library stands high in the affection of its public. It leads the ten largest cities of the United States in the percentage of readers to total circulation.

The work in the branches is of even greater importance than that in the main library. There were thirty of them as this was written, counting the municipal reference library in the City Hall. A careful study is made of the district in which each branch is located, and the branch librarian tries to meet its racial and cultural needs and make the branch a kind of community club. Friendships are possible between librarian and patron in the branches as they are not in the main library. In addition to the branches there were, at the end of 1929, 112 stations in hospitals and other public institutions, offices, and stores, circulating in a single year half a million books or more.

More important still are the school branches. Relations between libraries and schools are a ticklish problem and far from final solution, but in Cleveland they seem to be established on a fairly satisfactory basis. There were,

in 1929, thirty-five such branches, in addition to 1158 classroom libraries. These are conducted under the joint direction of the library and the Board of Education, and they account for nearly one fourth of the entire circulation of the library system. The Board furnishes the rooms and buys reference books, books for required reading, and "fact books." The library provides the general and recreational reading.

As yet there are few collections in the elementary schools, their use being largely confined to the high and junior high. The school librarians are selected from the teaching staff. Once a week they meet at the main library to discuss the purchase of new books. The choice is not an easy one, since the school libraries must keep up with new publications, yet must not be allowed to degenerate into collections of mystery stories and sensational fiction. Their importance can be readily understood, since they form the connecting link between the child's school reading and its later adult reading. No library which wishes to grow — nor any publisher or bookseller who is equally ambitious — can afford to neglect the child and the adolescent. The broadening of school curricula to include a wide range of required reading in place of exclusive reliance upon textbooks, the encouragement of "free reading" and the attempt to form reading habits in the youthful, may not be dramatic, but they will have a tremendous effect upon the kind and extent of adult reading done a few years from now.

The Chicago Public Library, like that in New York City, has been more concerned with keeping up with the insistent demands upon its services than with creating new demands. No sooner is a new branch library established, even though it is quite near an existing branch, than a new constituency springs up for it. "The fact is," said one member of the staff, "we don't dare to advertise."

Such publicity as is done is usually the work of the newer branches whose librarians wish to become acquainted with their neighbors. There are exhibits and displays, "weeks" devoted to special causes and some use of "film trailers" in motion-picture theaters. But these are occasional and form no part of a long-time policy. The library does not go into the highways and byways after customers.

The library goes back to 1873. After the great fire of 1871, an English committee headed by Thomas Hughes collected and sent a large number of books. Queen Victoria, Thomas Carlyle, Disraeli, Gladstone, Herbert Spencer, Professor Tyndall, and Tennyson all contributed, and so did almost every English author of note. With the characteristic practicality of a very practical city, the Chicago library authorities placed the books at once in general circulation and most of them were worn out — a crime from the collector's point of view, but thoroughly in accord with the modern conception of what a library is for. Some eight thousand volumes were assembled in this way. In January, 1873, the library was formally opened, in an old building whose principal feature was a large water-tank converted to the function of storing books. William Frederick Poole, founder of "Poole's Index," now the "Reader's Guide," was the first librarian. In 1897, the library had grown to proportions, both as to collections and as to patronage, which justified the imposing building erected for its uses in that year and still occupied. As library buildings very soon go out of date, it might have been just as well if Chicago's burst of generosity in this matter had come a decade or two later.

The Chicago Library is mainly a circulating collection, only about twenty per cent of its stock being reference books. The existence of the Newberry Library, specializing in history, and the John Crerar, specializing in science, has allowed the Public Library to devote itself to general

literature. The architectural limitations of a building which has swiftly grown old, and the fact that the books have not been uniformly classified, have prevented the application of the open-shelf system to the main building, though it has been installed in the forty-three branches.

Like the Boston Public Library, the Chicago institution may be said to have aimed at quality rather than quantity of circulation — at "closer contact with individuals" rather than in adding millions to its annual totals of books borrowed. It was one of the first of American libraries to install a readers' advisory service. With its emphasis upon quality, it is perhaps more conservative than most libraries in buying new books, and often does not attempt to compete with the booksellers in having them in stock on the day of publication. This is a moot point in library management. Another moot point is the rental system. The Chicago Public Library maintains a rental list of new books, as well as a free list of books which are lent in the usual manner in the order of application. A rental service of this sort necessarily competes with the private rental libraries. It is defended on the ground that a library should offer a complete book service to its patrons. In most progressive libraries the drift is away from the rental system. Some librarians would frankly be glad to see the handling of new fiction, with the exception of those books which are likely to become standard, left altogether to private enterprise. The increased interest in serious reading gives strength to this tendency. The discrimination against fiction may, of course, be criticized on the ground that no one knows until he has read a novel whether or not it is "serious." The separate classification of fiction and non-fiction tells a great deal about a library and its patrons, but at best it is a crude method of measurement.

Counting branches, sub-branches, schoolroom deposits,

deposit stations, business-house libraries, and special deposits of one kind and another, the Chicago Public Library now has nearly four thousand book-distributing agencies. Not all of these can be cared for by trained library workers, though the readers are assisted by lists furnished by the readers' adviser. Despite the large number of books handled by the school libraries — about ten per cent of the total annual circulation of the system — the Chicago Board of Education at this writing has failed to provide a school library programme in any way comparable with that which has worked so successfully in Cleveland. As the chief of the library's Schools Department said in a recent report, "Buildings are being erected with beautiful library rooms and no definite provisions for books or librarians." But this is no fault of the library, and may be remedied when there is an improvement in the political situation in which the Chicago Board of Education is and has long been involved.

The St. Louis Public Library, headed by Dr. Arthur E. Bostwick, author of the standard one-volume book on the American public library, is a progressive institution in a State which has, as I write, eighty counties without tax-supported public libraries and which ranks twenty-fifth among American States in the number of volumes per capita in public libraries. In view of the difficulty that has been experienced in working out a fruitful co-operation between libraries and schools in Chicago and some other cities, it is interesting to learn that the first proposal for a public library in St. Louis was made, in 1860, by the superintendent of schools, who recommended "the institution of a library as an integral part of our public school system." As established in 1865, the library was entitled "The Public School Library and Lyceum," and four years later it was actually transferred to the School Board.

At first fees were charged. It was not until 1894 that the institution was made free to all citizens and supported by direct taxation, and not until 1912 was it housed in a building devoted exclusively to library purposes, one third of the necessary funds being donated by Andrew Carnegie. The library at an early date had some unique features — the first "Public Writing-Room" in any public library, this being opened in 1914, and a "Library Hostess," appointed in 1894. This position was in a way an anticipation of the readers' advisory service. The "library hostess" really has been a hostess, making it her duty "to welcome strangers to the library and give them their first impression of its cordial hospitality." To one who has visited many libraries, some of them with far larger book collections than St. Louis has, this phrase of Dr. Bostwick's, applied to the pioneer work of Mrs. Laura Speck, is singularly impressive. Hospitality is a virtue that cannot be bought with money nor guaranteed by systems. It comes from the hearts of men and women who know human nature as well as literature. It makes the difference between a collection of printed material and a true library. A little of it will go a long way in making books, for lonely persons in great cities, something more than anodynes.

The advisory service in the St. Louis Library is less formal than that in Cleveland, Boston, New York, or Chicago. The adviser sits at the entrance to the main reading-room, and gives out general information as well as advice. Probably this brings to her desk many patrons whose pride or timidity would keep them from knocking at the door of a formal office with a label on the outside. At the opposite side of the entrance is a regular information desk, such as may be found in any large library. The reader may pause by chance at either desk and be referred from one to the other, according to his need. The advisory desk has a small working collection of books, printed reading lists, and a

poster screen. On a typical day the adviser or her assistant may answer questions over the telephone, fill out catalogue cards, and give assistance to patrons ranging all the way from the man who wants enlightenment on the subject of bricklaying to the university student looking for a good short-story course.

During any day [writes Miss Margaret Doud, in her capacity of adviser] we do such things as demonstrate the use of the dial telephone, reassure a nice father who knows that his son is coming to no good end because "he is a dreamy lad and dislikes mathematics," and telephone to a personal friend who is omniscient in such matters to learn if it is safe, what with high water and the floods, for an elderly gentleman from the Far West to travel by steamboat from St. Louis to Cape Girardeau.

Some readers ask only for scraps of information like this. Others follow regular courses over long periods of time, so that the work of the adviser plays an important part in serious attempts at adult education — or self-education. She co-operates, as a matter of course, with clubs, labor unions, the Y.W.C.A., and other organizations which have classes in adult education. But the note of informal friendliness stands out in everything she does. Readers are never treated as "cases." I am tempted to quote one more passage from Miss Doud's admirable description of her work.

One of the wisest and kindest, most sensible, human and tolerant men we have ever known [she says] is a colored man past middle age, whose formal education was of the type given to colored children in Georgia fifty years ago. Imagine the difference between him, with his mellow philosophy and his experience in living, and the synthetic man he would become if shot into the pigeon holes of a case record demanding such information as "previous schooling," "attendance at lectures and exhibits," and "cultural resources of home."

Records are a valuable appendage to any readers' advisory service. When enough of them have been taken and analyzed, we may know more than we now do about the best ways of publishing and distributing "serious books." But the tail ought never to wag the dog. The reader is more important than what he reads.

I have spoken at some length about the advisory service because it is typical of the library. The cant phrase of many business houses about selling service instead of goods might be applied here with some meaning. The St. Louis Public Library is far less a mechanism for buying and circulating books than a means of bringing individuals into touch with the good things which good books happen to contain. The publicity, carried on by means of radio talks, library publications, pamphlets on special topics, and intelligent co-operation with the newspapers, always has this end in view.

The success of these efforts is hard to analyze, for statistics do not tell the whole story and sometimes tell a misleading story. What has been said of the method and spirit of the central library applies, of course, to the branch libraries. These vary necessarily in their atmosphere, as they do in all cities, with the racial, religious and economic backgrounds of those who use them. In a well-to-do and sophisticated section the problem of the branch librarian is obviously different from that she encounters in the poorer districts. It may be just as difficult, however. As about eighty per cent of the circulation is in the branches, stations, and traveling libraries, there are endless complications of detail. Yet the principle of studying the reader as well as the books seems to be applied everywhere. As to the quality of the reading done, it is interesting to observe that nearly half of the adult circulation is non-fiction — a proportion twice as large as that in Boston. As previously stated I use this measurement of fiction and non-fiction for

what it is worth, and do not assume that it is an absolute test of quality of reading.

As we have seen, some city libraries do not require publicity to bring in readers, for they have more readers than they can handle adequately. Baltimore a few years ago had a different problem on its hands. A library had been built up through the generosity of two individuals and the labors of a gifted librarian who loved books. Enoch Pratt had given approximately one and one third million dollars and Andrew Carnegie half a million, and the money had been well spent. But the facilities for bringing the people to the library and the library to the people had been somewhat neglected. A new incumbent of the librarian's post, Dr. Joseph L. Wheeler, found himself with a job of publicity on his hands. Fortunately he also had the ability to deal with it, for he happened to be one of the best publicists in the library field. In 1925, according to the A.L.A. tables, Baltimore, with a library circulation of 1.1 books per capita per annum, ranked lowest among the forty-one class A libraries reporting. A comparison of this figure with San Diego's 10.3 or the 9.3 of Newton, Massachusetts, was inevitably a challenge. There were many reasons for the situation, not all of them directly connected with the public's attitude toward the library. A distribution of functions among the city's existing libraries and a merger of the Enoch Pratt with the smaller City Library were recommended by a committee which investigated and reported after the immemorial fashion of committees. But the principal task seemed to be to make Baltimore, in the well-worn but still useful phrase, "book-conscious."

Dr. Wheeler took up the load with vigor and enthusiasm, scorning no reasonable means of attaining his end. He used every known publicity device that could be adapted to library purposes, as well as a number that no one else had thought of. He set up a printing press in the library

and from it poured out a flood of book lists, book notes, bookmarks, and brief essays about books. Like energetic librarians elsewhere he seized upon every current event, of local or general interest, to bring home the usefulness of books. Joining hands with the Maryland Public Library Advisory Commission, he issued "Home Reading Certificates" to adults who had followed selected courses. These certificates were of no practical use whatever, but people liked them and were proud to have them. He installed a branch library at the food show. He even printed library publicity on the pasteboard cards used by laundries, so that men might read it in the reflective interval between taking the pins out of their shirts and putting in the studs and cuff-links. Acting on the theory that word of mouth does most to popularize good books — or bad ones, for that matter — he sent a carefully winnowed book list regularly to a thousand "key" people. In a single year he produced three and a half million pieces of publicity material, some of it so good that other libraries clamored for it. He secured the ungrudging support of the Baltimore newspapers and, being himself a good writer, contributed occasional articles to their columns.

The results were soon manifest. From little over 1,000,000 in 1926 the circulation of books rose to about 2,500,000 in 1929. The number of registered borrowers during the same period increased by about 60 per cent. The average borrower in 1926 took out less than 16 books a year, in 1929 more than 21. At the same time the use of the reference books in the main library and its 27 branches and 287 stations — 262 of which were in schoolrooms — increased three or four times over. All this was done while the average cost of circulation per book was being cut by about 40 per cent, and while Baltimore was spending less than two thirds the low national average per capita on its library service. What might have been done if Balti-

more had had Cleveland's $1.39 per capita or Boston's $1.23, instead of a bare 46 cents or less, may be surmised. The experiment showed, as every similar experiment, without any exception that I know of, does show, that multitudes of people who do not read books would do so if sufficiently encouraged, and that other multitudes who read few books could be induced by comparatively simple means to read more.

Before this treatise is in print, Baltimore may be well along with its new central library building, for which funds were voted in 1927, and for which plans have been prepared pending the adjustment of certain legal difficulties. I have not space to go into the details of architecture and arrangement, though they are fascinating. But the new building will embody one striking conviction — that if the library is to attract readers, it must do so exactly as a store attracts customers. The first floor will contain the main book services, so that no one will be asked to walk up unnecessary flights of stairs. Moreover, the exterior view will show "through the windows, the actual use of the library in its more usual functions, as a perennial exposition and a public demonstration of the part that books may play in the life of all intelligent citizens." There will be "broad and low windows flush with the inner edge of the sidewalk" — in short, show windows. As Dr. Wheeler has put it: "The effective way in which to make library service an everyday part of the community's life is to design the exterior so that every man as he passes sees how essential it is to his fellows. The library should be 'The house by the side of the road.' "

I now come to two more libraries which are the expressions of outstanding personalities and both of which are refreshingly individual. The Public Library at Newark, New Jersey, like so many other institutions within the shadow of Greater New York, ran the risk of being over-

looked. That it was not overlooked, but became perhaps the most talked-of library in America, was due largely to the enthusiasm and notable articulateness of the late John Cotton Dana, a librarian of original and provocative ideas. Many librarians disagreed with Mr. Dana, but no wide-awake librarian could ignore him. Mr. Dana came to Newark in 1902 after some forty-six years of extraordinarily varied experience. He had been a country school teacher, a lawyer, a surveyor, and a country editor, and had lived in New England, New York City, Colorado, and Minnesota. For nine years he was at the head of the Denver Public Library, building it up from two thousand to forty thousand volumes. Late in 1897, he became head of the City Library of Springfield, Massachusetts, and in four years increased the number of volumes lent for home use by forty-five per cent and brought about a decrease of twenty-four per cent in the proportion of fiction lent. The less fiction a library lent, the better Mr. Dana thought of it. I shall touch on that point again in a few moments.

Apparently Mr. Dana was one of the first, and perhaps the first, of American librarians to make full use of modern publicity methods. He was every bit as ingenious as Dr. Wheeler, which is saying a great deal. His policies are now familiar, but they were novel, in fact almost revolutionary, when he introduced them. He succeeded in making the library a source of news, to which the public as well as the hard-boiled newspaper editors turned, not as a duty, but with real interest. In the last year of his life the library published or assisted in publishing one hundred book lists, bulletins, and leaflets "to bring to the attention of the people of Newark the books, magazines, pamphlets, pictures, and information sources that are maintained for their service." He opened eight new branches, including the famous Business Branch. He established an Art Department, which lends not only books but pictures

— at the present time about a quarter of a million pictures a year. He threw open every department of the library to the fullest possible extent, so that it literally and completely became a "free public library." He established a system of school libraries, by which not only books in cases, but maps, pamphlets, and magazines are delivered by truck on request to any school or classroom in Newark. As a result "over one third of the library books read by children in Newark are drawn from classroom libraries which every teacher is permitted but not obliged to have." He set up special libraries for teachers. He established well-equipped children's rooms or departments in the main library and its branches. Through the Extension Department he was responsible for creating library agencies in stores, factories, camps, and other places, including jails, where books are wanted.

It would be difficult to say how many innovations in library service Mr. Dana was responsible for. Perhaps it is not important to find out. His results are a sufficient monument for any librarian. Between 1902 and 1929 he increased the circulation of books lent for home use from 357,266 to 1,795,067, a rate of growth far exceeding the growth of population. He built up the library from 79,000 to nearly 400,000 volumes. Under his leadership the number of registered borrowers grew from one in ten of the population of the city to one in six. He achieved these results, not merely by getting library patrons to read more books, but by getting them to read better books. His opposition to current fiction is evidence that he did not seek bulk circulation in the easiest way.

Mr. Dana's argument was [says one who served under him] that the supply of fiction in any city to-day is adequately taken care of, at comparatively small cost to the reader, by commercial lending libraries, by the increasing number of bookshops, and by the magazine stands loaded with story magazines costing from

five to fifty cents. It was Mr. Dana's feeling that this situation indicated that the public library would soon be pushed out of the field of fiction if it did not withdraw of its own accord, and that the money being put into current fiction would be put to more legitimate use in buying the books in other fields which are too expensive for the average man to buy, and also in information services aimed to facilitate the extracting of facts from the flood of literature being published every day.

I will let this argument stand for what it is worth. It can hardly be ignored. It leads, clearly, to a discussion of the relative *functions* of libraries, bookstores, and periodical counters. When those functions are better understood, the fiction problem may settle itself without bloodshed.

Mr. Dana saw the cultural life of Newark as a whole, not as a thing bound between board covers. Hence his collections in the arts and in natural history, which finally grew into the Newark Museum. It was his idea that the library and the museum should supplement each other, as under his able direction and that of his successor and former assistant, Miss Beatrice Winser, they did and do. Visitors to the museum are furnished with book lists which send them to the library and visitors to the library are referred to museum material. The two institutions are so near together that many persons habitually do go from one to the other.

It might have been better yet if both collections could have been housed in the same building, in a true cultural community center. The idea may not be one which would work well in a city larger than Newark. It would certainly upset the mechanism of a large public library organized on what might be called the factory plan. But it is possible that Mr. Dana was on the right track. Permanent or temporary exhibitions in the arts have been common and successful in connection with public libraries. One can imagine the lure of an institution which would combine, simply and humanly, the advantages offered by the

New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Museum of Natural History, even on a smaller scale than any one of these institutions taken separately.

For my last library visit I shall go across the international boundary. Dr. George Locke, of the Public Library of Toronto, is another librarian who thinks in terms of individuals rather than in terms of books. Not that he does not also know books from A to Z and back again. The library which he has built up, and which is having so large an influence upon the community life of Toronto, is at present largely a projection of one man's influence. This factor may not result in the creation of a smoothly working machine, but while the influence lasts it does wonders. When Dr. Locke came to Toronto in 1909, the library had a circulation of 400,000; by the end of 1929 this had grown to 3,000,000. But bulk circulation does not tell the whole story, perhaps not even the important part of the story. It is not only the total use made of the library, but the kind of use that counts.

Dr. Locke's enthusiasms range all the way from new rolling shelf equipment, which makes it possible to store several times as many inactive books as before, to energetic encouragement of drama and art classes in the branches. Every device to make library service quick and efficient has been employed without at the same time making it perfunctory. The arrangement of the central library, with its newly added modern wing, has been carefully studied. The young people's room has been so arranged that its youthful patrons must cross the main catalogue room in order to reach it, and they are encouraged to explore the grown-up books when they feel like doing so. Adjacent to the main library a comfortable old dwelling-house has been taken over as a "Boys' and Girls' House." Here are not only books, but a small theater, assembly-room, pictures, and the facilities for a simple sort of club life. The

small readers are not only led to read good books, but are subtly taught some of the amenities of life. The very fact that the building is a house and not an institution seems to help toward these ends.

The branches — seventeen in number at this writing — have grown from two which existed in 1909. One pleasant custom in the branches is the open-house gathering on Saturday evenings, at which the patrons have a chance to become acquainted with the librarians and with one another. The librarians take it upon themselves to act as hostesses, and this has turned out to be one of the best means by which a newcomer to Toronto can make friends. One typical branch has art exhibitions, evening meetings at which books are read aloud and discussed, an active drama league which gives awards for the best plays written in the district, and several reading clubs. Another has a workers' educational class at which plays are read aloud — before an open fire when the weather is cold. Music hours are another experiment which has proved eminently successful. The singing of Christmas carols at their proper season stirs up immense enthusiasm. Some of these activities have no direct connection with books, but when Dr. Locke's clientèle does get around to reading, its instincts for singing, talking, and acting have been satisfied and it can keep its mind on the printed page. I doubt that reading is ever much fun if the reader can't talk to some one about it afterwards. Parenthetically, my own surveys of libraries have convinced me that every large institution of the sort ought to have not only reading-rooms, but at least one talking-room. I think Dr. Locke might agree with me.

Besides organizing its own dramatic, historical, and literary clubs, the Toronto Library co-operates, as a matter of course, with such organizations as the University Extension Classes and the Workers' Educational Association. Its technical methods and equipment seem as admirable

as its guiding spirit, though possibly not so important. It can produce books from its main stacks in a surprisingly small number of seconds, and its systems of inter-library and inter-branch loans, with daily truck deliveries, makes every public-library book in Toronto available in due season to every reader. The work has been done on a per capita appropriation by the city of from sixty-five to sixty-nine cents a year. This appropriation is fixed annually by vote of the City Council. "It's a good thing," so Dr. Locke believes, "for an institution to have to defend itself once a year." He keeps his books and buildings before the public by the ordinary means of publicity and by taking an active part personally in all community affairs.

The Toronto Public Library is, therefore, to some degree the lengthened shadow of a man. Nevertheless, it holds so firm a place in the city's affections that it is hard to believe that it will be allowed to stagnate when Dr. Locke retires. He has enlisted on his staff many young workers who do not plan to make library work a permanent career. But even these workers, though they may marry after a year or two and give up library service, can be counted on to retain a keen interest in the library and to do missionary work for it. Library work and library support in Toronto are fashionable, even though in operation this is one of the most democratic institutions of its kind in North America.

Eight city libraries cannot tell us everything about city libraries. But I think we have seen enough to be sure that in this day of intensive and extensive publicity library service cannot be left to grow by accretion. It must, as I have pointed out, go into the market-place and there compete with other contestants for the popular attention. Many people will read books — even good books — without urging. But the reading of books, through libraries or through bookstores, will not grow without cultivation. The habit may or may not be formed in the schools. Prob-

ably the schools are doing more to make readers than they did ten or twenty years ago. But the schools cannot do everything. They cannot be wet-nurses to an entire population. The library must make itself not merely a passive but an active agency of adult education. It must dramatize itself, first, to secure the financial support without which it cannot operate, second, to bring people within its doors so that it will not operate in a vacuum. Or, if its rooms are already crowded, it must somehow contrive to lift itself above the crowd and to bring light and fire to the dull mass. Technique is something; love of humanity and love of knowledge are more. As Dr. Wheeler has put it: "Library workers have devoted too small a share of their thought to the people and affairs outside their buildings; too much time in getting books ready for use in proportion to the amount of time devoted to getting them used."

Publicity is a cheap thing only when its objectives are cheap. No librarian ought to worry whether or not the publicity which will get good books used is dignified or not. My impression, indeed, is that there has been, in libraries as in some other phases of the publication and distribution of books, altogether too much dignity. Readers have been frightened off. Reading has been made to appear formidable — as a process which might have its rewards, but which was attended by considerable pain. Human nature being what it is, this method will not work. At least, its results will not be to get books read. Particularly will it not work in the United States, where so many effortless and painless means of passing the time — the motion pictures, the radio, the pleasure automobile, the golf course — are within the reach of almost every one.

Publicity does not end as one approaches the library's doors. There has to be publicity inside. The reader in the majority of cases needs help in finding what the library has to offer him or her individually and personally.

It is not enough that wisdom and understanding are locked up within the four walls. Wisdom and understanding are abstractions. It is an awful thing to face a hungry and lonesome human soul and offer it abstractions. Yet this seems to be the predicament in which the librarian sooner or later finds himself. He tries to solve it by means of book lists, reading courses, reading groups, the readers' advisory service. But these are the mere machinery of the solution. They are devices. They cannot be successful unless the librarian possesses tact and understanding — almost, I was about to say, unless he possesses an humble and a contrite heart. He must not tell the reader what he wants. To do that is to reinforce the standardization of which we all have too much in our daily routine. Our national culture is probably not injured when a majority of us are induced to use the same safety razor, but it would be if we could all be induced to read the same list of highly edifying books. The librarian's function, and a very difficult and delicate one it is, is to tailor the clothes to fit the reader — not the reader to fit the clothes.

This, it seems to me, is what library work comes to in the end. The libraries ought to be an integral part of our educational system. But they ought to be a great deal better than our educational system. No one can hold them down to rigid requirements, such as preparing students for college or manufacturing doctors of philosophy. They have room to grow. They have it within their power to do much toward liberalizing and humanizing the thinking of the American people. This may take a long time. One's opinion as to that varies with the contents of each morning's newspaper. But the libraries must move fast. Press, radio, motion pictures, all are moving fast in twentieth-century America. The library, following the confessed example of Theodore Roosevelt in the famous charge up San Juan Hill, must "run like hell to keep up."

CHAPTER XII

THE RURAL LIBRARY

THE task of most libraries in large cities is to induce people to make intelligent use of the facilities for borrowing books which are offered them. In a great number of the smaller cities and towns and almost universally in the rural districts, the task is to provide the facilities. I have pointed out that the inquiry made by the American Library Association a few years ago showed that at that time eighty-three per cent of the entire rural population had no public-library service. The percentage is less now, for rural-library service is spreading rapidly. It will have to do a good deal of spreading before rural America can be said to be well supplied with books. I shall be concerned in this chapter with some outstanding experiments in rural-library service. Do these experiments indicate that our rural population neglects books merely because books are hard to procure? Do they add to the evidence that there is an immense book "market" which no one, either for commercial reasons or out of love for his fellowmen, has yet exploited?

There can be no doubt that at least a portion of the rural fraction of the nation wants more books than it gets. Very simple tests prove this. Some city libraries sent their worn-out volumes to regions without libraries. The Toronto Public Library follows this practice. Not long ago Director Locke had a letter from a man in the north-shore wilderness of Lake Superior who had traveled forty miles on snowshoes to get a book. One hears similar stories from Alaska and the mountains of Kentucky. But

the situation does not usually require such heroic efforts. The rural populations of the United States and of most parts of Canada are physically within easy access. It is only in the cultural sense that they are remote. If the overwhelming majority of them — enough to make or break a President and a party — are cut off from books, it is because their needs have not been recognized, and because the necessary machinery, financial and administrative, has not been set up to meet those needs. Repeated demonstrations have shown that farmers, being very much like other people, will read when they have time and a good book.

We have glanced at the beginnings of rural libraries in an earlier chapter. They have been state, county, or township, according to the political organization prevailing and the local conditions. The county or state system has usually worked best, because few townships, even in States which have had laws providing for township libraries, have sufficient resources to support a good library. In Indiana, in 1922, only 199 out of 1017 townships had availed themselves of the permissive state law. State extension service began in Massachusetts in 1890 and state circulating libraries began in New York in 1892. Some forty States now have state extension service and about thirty-five have circulating collections. The first county libraries, those in Van West County, Ohio, and Washington County, Maryland, were established in 1898. Since that time such libraries have been legalized in two thirds of the States, and late in 1929 some 245 counties were giving financial support to county library service.

I shall mention some of the outstanding rural-library services and shall then go a little more in detail into three which I have been fortunate enough to see in operation and which are typical of different stages of development in this field. Here, as elsewhere in this discussion, I shall be

anxious rather to present samples of what is being done than to gather an oppressive mass of statistics.

It will readily be seen that when there are more than three thousand counties in the United States, when only eleven hundred of these have library service of any kind within their borders, and when only two hundred and forty-five have county-library service the discrepancy between actual and possible county-library development is enormous. But what may be done and what needs to be done can be judged from what has been done. The States which stand out conspicuously are California, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In California alone, however, is there any approach to a complete library service on the county system. Massachusetts has an admirable state-wide service, but as the township, not the county, is in New England the political unit, the Bay State does not come in at this stage of the discussion.

The California county free library system is a model any State having a county form of political organization might well imitate. Many years ago, under the leadership of James L. Gillis, the State Librarian, California organized a state traveling-library system. This, as Mr. Gillis said, "had supplied reading matter in a great number of districts where before [its] coming no opportunity to use library books existed. The work had been of importance; but the inelasticity of the system, the great expense of shipping from and to a center in a State of California's dimensions, the inability of readers to visit the library and make selections of books suitable for personal needs, made it plain that some more adequate plan should be hit upon at least for the more populous districts." In 1909 a law legalizing this "more adequate plan" went into effect, and in 1911 this law was amended to remove certain defects. Under the amended statute, county libraries

are organized, their budgets are controlled by the county boards of supervisors, and school districts and existing libraries may contract with them for service. A county may contract for service from a city library; a separate county library may be established; or a county may contract for service from the library of an adjacent county of larger valuations and population. In 1929 there were forty-six county libraries in the fifty-eight counties of the State, ranging from that of Los Angeles, with its staff of fifty-nine assistants, to counties which could afford but a single librarian.

County library branches [writes May Dexter Henshall in "The Library Journal"] are established in thickly settled rural communities; sparsely settled mountain sections; in the desert area with its vast stretches of sagebrush plains dotted with widely separated families; in summer resorts in the heart of the national parks surrounded by giant sequoias, towering mountains, and enchanting waterfalls; lookout stations on mountain-tops with their vigilant guardians of the forests; on rocky islands or promontories where lighthouse keepers maintain their lonely vigil for seafarers; in convict camps for men working on state highways; in county jails; in institutions for delinquent young people; in offices of farm advisers, home demonstration agents, county health nurses, and superintendents of schools; in county hospitals and tubercular sanitoriums; in rural homes, country stores, barber shops, telephone offices, clubhouses, and even the office of a country newspaper. In fact, wherever people choose to live in California counties having county libraries, books will be made accessible to them.

The result is apparent in the circulation of public-library books per capita in California — 7.33 per annum, according to a table prepared by Dr. Louis K. Wilson, of the University of North Carolina. Californians read about twice as many library books per capita as the citizens of Vermont, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, Utah, and Washing-

ton; about three times as many as those of Michigan, Iowa, and Minnesota; about seven times as many as those of Nevada; and about forty times as many as those of Arkansas. Yet no one supposes that they are two, or three, or seven, or forty times as intelligent. They read because the books are there.

The workers responsible for this achievement, to quote Miss Henshall again, "range all the way from trained librarians in the large branches, the teachers in the school branches, the mother in the home, to the young man at the crossroads in the mountains who combines the dispensing of county library books with the sale of gasoline and groceries, while he fills in other odd minutes as operator of the country telephone and as postmaster for his section of the mountains." Books are distributed by trucks, in cars driven by the county librarian, by express and parcel post, and by "freight, boat, auto stage, horse stage, pack animals over mountain trails, and aerial trams, and in a few instances a book has been sent to a snow-bound mountain borrower by a mail carrier on skis." Of the 2875 active high and elementary school districts in the State 2464 had, by 1929, joined the county libraries. In this work Mr. Milton J. Fergueson, the state librarian, has proved an energetic, enthusiastic, and successful administrator, carrying to its fullest possible extent Mr. Gillis's dream of a book for every Californian who wants it. This is almost literally the case. No matter what the book, if it is in print or otherwise obtainable, the applicant will sooner or later receive it. In the State Library at Sacramento is a union catalogue of over a million books in the public and collegiate libraries of the State and of other States making interstate loans, and all of these books are available to residents of communities served by county libraries.

Montana, with not much more than one fourth as many books in her libraries or one fourth the library circulation

per capita, is an example of a State poorer and more sparsely settled than California, yet which has made marked progress. Montana's county library law was passed in 1915, and the first county library was established in the fall of that year. By the end of 1928 nine counties had organized, seven of them securing buildings of their own for their libraries. Sometimes the county provides its own book supply by purchase, sometimes it contracts with an existing city or town library. Books may be distributed from school branches, from "book deposit stations," or branch libraries. Book deposit stations have collections of books which are exchanged when their usefulness in a particular neighborhood has ended. The branch libraries have permanent collections.

One of Montana's branch libraries was established in a "Library Car," which was hauled along to provide books for men in logging camps. In nine months of a single year five thousand men visited this branch and thirty-two hundred books were issued — a phenomenon which doubtless would have struck some of the old-time loggers dumb with amazement and horror. In the deposit stations volunteer service is usually depended upon, and if some expertness is lacking, it is probably compensated for by the neighborliness and good-will of those in charge. A little more than half the patrons are children and young people; 22 per cent of the books read are non-fiction; the circulation per borrower runs as high as 22 books a year, with an average of a little less than 12; and the percentage of the population in the counties concerned who have registered as borrowers is 35.2. These figures ought to settle any doubt as to whether the people of these Montana counties wanted books. Yet before the county-library system was installed, few of them did have access to public-library books, and it is safe to say that few of them obtained good books, or many books of any kind, from any

other source. They are an example of a new and flourishing market, suggestive of what might be done in other counties of Montana and other States which do not yet have library service. And I have no doubt they would also buy books, particularly low-priced ones, if stocks were placed in drug-stores, general stores, grocery-stores, and filling stations.

Librarians now generally consider the county-library system the best means of getting books to people in the country and in small towns and even in some cases to people in cities. As Mr. Gillis pointed out, in the passage I quoted, the traveling-library system proved too "inelastic" in California. It belongs in the scale of evolution a step below the county plan. Nevertheless, it is a good deal better than nothing and, as I have shown, is employed to some extent in two thirds of our States. Seventeen States which make some use of package libraries reported increases for the first six months of 1929 over the first six months of 1928. California itself was among them, with an increase of 10 per cent in number of packages sent out. Louisiana had an increase of 82 per cent, New Hampshire 129 per cent, and Maine 289 per cent, Wisconsin of 7 per cent. Among these let us first take Wisconsin, a State in which the package library has had a long and successful trial.

The Wisconsin State Free Library Commission operates a library, organized in 1895, which in 1929 had about 115,000 volumes. It sends books both to groups and to individuals. Its book lists have won a reputation among librarians everywhere. For group use the books are made up in lots of fifty, which are packed in boxes specially designed for the purpose. Of each lot about one third are fiction, about one third adult non-fiction, and the remainder juveniles. Some seventy different collections are on the road all the time, and new collections are made

up from time to time to keep up with the output of new books. There are approximately twenty duplications of each collection. Thus there are about 3500 different titles in circulation at a given time and a stock of about 70,000 volumes available for this service. The boxes are sent to about 1200 deposit stations, and about half the stock is out at any given time. In addition to the packages some 50,000 books are sent out annually by mail to individuals, some of these from the library stock, others borrowed from the library of the University of Wisconsin or other libraries within or outside the State. It is impossible to ascertain the individual readings which the package books receive, but in some cases a book is read as many as forty times before it leaves a given community. When a collection has been read by all those interested, it is sent back to the library headquarters at Madison and a new box is sent in its place.

The Commission receives as many as four hundred letters from individuals on an average day, some of them revealing a pathetic degree of ignorance, but nearly all testifying to a hankering for books which if satisfied would remove a good deal of the ignorance. Teachers, school children, members of study clubs, and librarians in small communities most frequently ask for books. A day's mail, as Mr. C. B. Lester, the very able head of the Library Commission, describes it, may include "requests for books on hand-weaving, on astronomy, on the organization of an employment agency, on raising iris and peonies (including the selection of show flowers and the care of bulbs), on the mother and the home, on child psychology, on respiratory diseases, on parliamentary law, for reading or recitations suitable for presentation at a club meeting or a parent-teachers' association, plays for use by a troop of boy scouts, material on old pewters (especially tankards), and on public speaking."

I think Mr. Lester might agree that the final function of a traveling-library system is to make traveling libraries unnecessary. That is, the work may well be regarded as propaganda in favor of a county-library system. Neither selected packages of books nor direct mail service can take the place of a central library with a permanent collection, supplemented by branches and stations where the reader may at least have several hundred frequently renewed titles to choose from. But as an intelligent and well-administered step toward complete library service, one has to take one's hat off to the Wisconsin system.

From Wisconsin I turn to a State which ranks third from the bottom among American States in volume per capita in public libraries and library circulation per capita; which stands at the bottom of the list in the number of its magazine readers; and which is third from the bottom in its percentage of literacy. Mississippi has been handicapped by its comparative poverty and by the fact that more than half of its population is Negro. This is no criticism of the Negro. It is not possible to make book-readers of a people who have not had the advantages of a good common-school education. These advantages the Mississippi Negro has not had. Nor have the white schools been all that could be desired. Library work has consequently been slow in developing, even in the cities. In rural districts it has until recently been almost wholly lacking. In 1926 steps were taken to remedy this situation by establishing a State Library Commission. Unfortunately the appropriations for the purpose were small, and there were conservative influences in the state government which frowned upon this somewhat novel experiment.

The library work began with a collection of 6691 volumes which had been turned over to Mississippi by the American Library Asociation as the State's share of the Association's war libraries. All these books were at least ten

years old, most of them were well worn, and many of them had become obsolete with the march of events since the armistice. They had first been issued by mail through the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College, with which they had been deposited, under the rather over-ambitious slogan of "Books for Everybody in Mississippi." When the Library Commission took over these literary loaves and fishes, an active demand continued and several thousand volumes were kept continually on loan. Some were sent in lots to high schools. Requests from individuals were numerous, and pathetically out of proportion to the service which could be rendered.

In fact, I have mentioned Mississippi because of this striking contrast between the apparent demand for books and the means to meet that demand. The State is practically virgin soil, so far as books are concerned, but it seems to be ripe for cultivation. Naturally its demand for books will not be as high per capita as in States which have a lower percentage of illiteracy. Both in Mississippi and Louisiana the library movement has been held back by the fact that the "middle class," economically speaking, was and is relatively small. The purchase of books at standard prices has been beyond the means of thousands of the poorer families, and the well-to-do, retaining somewhat of the cultural tradition of the old plantation life, have purchased private libraries which make them independent of public ones.

But the Mississippi Commission, though limited in funds, is being ably administered and has ambitious projects. One of these is to send out model collections of children's books to the schools. As I write this, the State has not yet provided free school books. Doubtless it will do so as its resources increase and the spirit of the New South pervades it. The Library Commission is doing what it can to interest the public. Twice it has had exhibits at

the State Fair. It co-operates with existing county-library systems, of which as this is written there are, in a manner of speaking, fifteen. How many of these justify their title it is hard to say, for the amount of aid given by the county runs as low in some instances as one hundred dollars. But one county, Coahoma, in the rich Delta country, was spending six thousand dollars in the last year of which I have record, and had a book-wagon service and thirty or more stations.

Louisiana, with an illiteracy, according to the 1920 Census, of 21 per cent, as compared with Mississippi's 17.2 per cent, obviously has slightly fewer potential readers per unit of population. There are three parishes in the State where, because of local conditions, illiteracy runs as high as 49 per cent. Consequently, the State Library Commission, authorized in 1920 and organized in 1925 on a guarantee of funds made by the Carnegie Corporation, had its work cut out for it if it were to make a successful "demonstration." Its preliminary survey showed that "not more than four municipal libraries had been established in the past fifteen years, and fifty-nine parishes in the State had no public libraries of any kind, meaning that over 1,200,000 people living in rural Louisiana had no access to library service except the privilege of using the books in the school libraries when not needed for school use." But "everywhere the people seemed eager for the advantages of library service."

The Commission's programme was to give as much aid as it could toward the establishment of parish libraries — the parish in Louisiana being approximately the equivalent of the county in other States; to provide "an informational service to individuals living in districts without library facilities of any kind"; to give package library service to clubs and schools; and to "give all possible co-operation and encouragement to the establishment of a training course for

librarians in the State." The provisions under which it operates are much like those which have been generally adopted in other States having state commissions and county libraries. Existing public libraries may become parts of a new county system. A parish which cannot support a library of its own may contract with a neighboring parish for service, and two or more such parishes may unite in establishing a library if that seems the most economical method. The funds for maintenance of the parish libraries, except where temporary "demonstrations" have been paid for by outside funds, are provided by the police jury of each parish — roughly the equivalent of the county boards of supervisors in many other States. Gifts can be accepted, but the State Library Commission holds up the ideal of the "tax-supported free public library" as the objective.

"The Parish Library," says one of the Commission's statements, "provides specific knowledge that means advancement in business from a financial point of view. It provides marketing news, addresses of business firms, formulas and recipes, collection letters, books on banking and advertising, and many other business phases. Also the business or professional man who wishes to change his occupation or better his business methods may read with profit books from the Parish Library. It furnishes information to teachers, ministers, physicians, legislators, to all persons upon whose work and knowledge depend the intellectual, moral, and political welfare and advancement of the parish. The library furnishes books and magazines for the technical instruction of mechanics, artisans, manufacturers, and all others upon whose work depends industrial progress. Farming may be made more prosperous and farm life more attractive when the farmer learns profitable raising and marketing of crops. The library helps every one who helps himself." This plain "selling

talk" may grate upon the sensibilities of the ethereal-minded. It is not easy to sell "Culture" with a capital "C" to a hard-working and not over-imaginative rural community. Nevertheless the "culture," with a large or small initial letter, is there for those who can grasp it.

Three "demonstrations" helped to convince Louisianians of the desirability of the parish library. One of these was at Richland, in the northern part of the State. Here an existing library was assisted to expand its work. "The headquarters library was kept open by the librarian," says a Commission report, telling of the flood year of 1927, "when only one other business in the town was open, and an average of sixty books a day were loaned out. The people waded, came in boats, and each person took away books to keep the whole family entertained when all out-of-door activities ceased." In eight months after the flood, the main library and its stations lent about 50,000 books. In Jefferson Davis Parish an entirely new library was successfully organized, with a total collection of about 4000 books. During the first six months about 26,000 books were borrowed by a population totaling about 4000. That is, each book circulated more than six times and more than six books per capita were read.

A third demonstration which worked so well as to be taken over by the local authorities was that in Concordia Parish, opposite Natchez. Here, as at Richland, great damage had been done by the flood of 1927. Branches and stations were established, some of them in schoolhouses where the high-water mark still showed in the damp plaster on the wall. Concordia, though it has grown considerably in wealth and population during the past few years, is not rich and the funds available from local sources were limited. Branch librarians and station custodians had to be chosen from teachers and other local residents who were intelligent and public-spirited, but not trained in library

work. The librarian in general charge was obliged to depend on the bus service or the voluntary assistance of persons interested in the library in order to make her rounds. She was able, fortunately, to enter heartily into community interests and to win support even from those who had previously been skeptical.

A visitor from California or Massachusetts might have thought the supply of books inadequate and some of the stations and branches primitive in their arrangements. But the eagerness of the people to secure books was just as apparent as it is in States which have long had model library facilities. Perhaps it was greater because of the novelty of the service. After going the rounds of the Concordia system, I found it impossible to believe that the residents of the parish would ever voluntarily give it up. And as this and other parishes where demonstrations were made were chosen, not because they were exceptional, but because they were considered typical, it is reasonable to suppose that the same results could be secured by an equivalent application of money, tact, and intelligence in any other parish in Louisiana. One gets from such experiments a dazzling picture of the possibilities of the rural book "market." Even publishers and book retailers, who complain of the public's apathy toward their wares, might learn a great deal from "backward" Louisiana.

It will not be out of place to mention here that library development in the South has been given an impetus by the standards adopted not long ago for accredited schools. These, which are effective in both the States we have been discussing, call for at least "five hundred well-selected books, exclusive of government documents, textbooks, and duplicates, to meet the needs for reference, supplementary reading, and cultural and inspirational reading" in every high school of one hundred students or less; and more in the larger schools until for an enrollment of one thousand

or more students there are required "five thousand or more well-selected books, newspapers, and at least forty suitable periodicals." There must be a teacher-librarian with at least six weeks' training in library work for the smaller schools and in the largest schools a full-time librarian "with college graduation and at least one year in an approved library school." From seventy-five cents to a dollar a year for each student must be spent on books for these school libraries, and a course of at least twelve lessons in the use of the library must be given.

These requirements have an important bearing on the future development of libraries and library work in the Southern States. Students who have used the book collections and taken the required courses will be less likely to be content with no libraries or with inadequate ones after they graduate, and the school libraries will undoubtedly have an influence upon all library work. In addition, the need for teacher-librarians will stimulate the opening of library schools and library courses, which have been sadly few south of the Mason and Dixon line. It is not unreasonable to expect that the South, which is showing so many signs of an economic and cultural awakening, will see a large development during the next generations in libraries and probably also in book sales.

The State of Massachusetts stands at the head of the national list in books in libraries per capita, though in library circulation it is greatly exceeded by California and is not far ahead of Oregon. Some years ago Mr. Charles F.D. Belden, head of the Boston Public Library and member of the State Board of Free Public Library Commissioners, estimated that "if the public libraries [of Massachusetts] were evenly distributed there would be a main library to every twenty square miles; branches and deposits would be in sight of each other, if not in hailing distance; to be exact, one and twenty-seven hundredths miles

apart." Since Mr. Belden made these calculations the number of Massachusetts public libraries has somewhat increased, whereas the area of the State has remained the same, so that the final fraction would now be somewhat smaller.

Until a short time ago Massachusetts had a Free Public Library Commission. The same work is still being carried on, but under a Division of Public Libraries in the Department of Education. The change of title perhaps represents a significant assembling of functions. The division has no supervisory power. It makes loans and gifts to the smaller and needier libraries, conducts lecture courses and institutes, and is assisted by twenty-six advisory visitors. A trained and salaried field library adviser spends much of her time among the smaller libraries, which usually cannot afford trained librarians. The adviser also visits schools. The general secretary of the division has done much to introduce libraries into prisons, reformatories, hospitals, and even homes for the feeble-minded. The division's staff make public addresses, issue leaflets of information for those interested in libraries, procure competent architectural advice for communities wishing to build or remodel their library buildings, and give the libraries aid in their work with the foreign-born. In this field traveling libraries are still useful, and the division has circulated books regularly, not only in the common European tongues, but in Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Finnish, Gaelic, and Turkish languages. The service rendered in this way to foreigners who otherwise might have no access to books in their native vernacular, and sometimes not even to newspapers, is hard to overestimate.

As I have said in earlier paragraphs, I am not trying to give in this chapter a well-rounded picture of rural and small-town library service. That cannot be done in a chapter or in a small book. If I have produced evidence

which indicates that people in isolated communities will read when they have the opportunity, I have done what I set out to do. There can be little doubt that county, parish, and township libraries will succeed wherever they are adequately financed and intelligently managed. Narrow-mindedness, pinch-penny policies, and public apathy are all that keep them back. The craving for books — even for good books — exists and can be cultivated. One finds it wherever one fishes for it. It is not destroyed simply because other means of recreation exist in abundance — in California, for instance, where an admirable system of state roads makes isolation rare except in a few mountainous regions inhabited by but a small portion of the population.

The interests of the whole of what I have called the book trade — publishers and booksellers as well as librarians — are affected by these demonstrations. People who will borrow books from libraries can also be induced, though naturally in smaller numbers, to buy them. The rural libraries are making a market which sellers of books — and particularly sellers of reprints and low-priced editions — could probably cultivate to good advantage. It is, of course, easier to say this than to indicate the means for doing it. As the chain stores penetrate to the smaller towns, and perhaps even to the crossroads, they may find means to achieve this end. There may be a development of extensive bookstore chains. It may then be possible for the rural libraries to select their books more carefully, dividing their functions with the stores — cutting down on the more ephemeral fiction, for example, if the stores provide it at reasonable prices.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GEOGRAPHY OF READING

WHERE there is illiteracy there obviously will be, to the extent of the illiteracy, no demand for books. In this age, when it can almost be said that the eye is tormented with printed words wherever it turns, by day or night, it is surprising as well as appalling to think that there are still many millions of Americans who do not know how to read. The number is diminishing, for it amounted to about one in every thirteen of the population ten years old and over in 1910 and was only one in seventeen in 1920. The census returns for 1930 will doubtless show a still further decrease. But even though illiteracy tends to disappear, it leaves traces which will be long in vanishing, for those who have just learned to read are not likely to have a high standard of literary appreciation.

If we look at the literacy tables by States, we find a significant grouping. The States having the largest number of illiterates in proportion to population in 1920 were, in order: Louisiana, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, New Mexico, Arizona, Georgia (the two latter States are tied for sixth place in the 1920 tables), North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. All of these had more than ten per cent of illiteracy. Now let us look at the other side of the picture. The States having the lowest percentage of illiteracy were, in order: Iowa, Nebraska, Idaho and Oregon, Kansas, South Dakota and Washington, Minnesota and Utah. Idaho and Oregon and South Dakota and Washington were tied for their respective places. All of these commonwealths had less than two per cent illiteracy. Curiously enough, the two States with perhaps

the best all-round library systems, Massachusetts and California, had a rather high percentage — the former 4.7 and the latter 3.3.

It is a matter of common knowledge that these percentages are enormously affected by racial elements. For example, the percentage for native-born whites in 1920 was 2; that for foreign-born, 13.1; that for Negroes, 22.9. For illiteracy among the white races New Mexico heads the list with 11.6 per cent, Louisiana coming next with 10.5. But as a group the South Central and South Atlantic States have the largest percentages, whether whites of native birth or Negroes are taken, separately or jointly. Illiteracy among the foreign-born is more evenly distributed, though there are large and rather puzzling fluctuations. Why, for instance, should the percentage be nearly 30 in the West South Central States and less than half that in the South Atlantic? The key may lie in the greater number of poorly educated Mexicans who have crossed the line into the more western of the Southern States. However, if we are to regard reading as a knack any race may acquire, and in a democracy must acquire, we must look upon racial and sectional variations in literacy as historical accidents which can be corrected. The existing figures are important, not because we believe that low cultural standards in certain regions and among certain races are inevitable, but because we believe they are not.

It requires no particular discernment to see that the problem is one of mass education, and that there can be no large book market until the necessary spade work has been done. This does not mean, of course, that larger numbers of books may not be sold or otherwise circulated in these States than has heretofore been the case. The educated minority in the South and in portions of the mountain States exists and can be reached. The librarian's task is to awaken an entire community, the bookseller's to find

purchasers for his wares. If the Southern minority were canvassed to the fullest possible extent, Southern book circulation could undoubtedly be at once greatly increased. The South is awakening. Mr. T. H. Alexander, writing in the Memphis "Commercial Appeal" late in 1929, quotes an "oracle" who "relates that standardized culture is not even sick in the South, because Tennessee alone has bought more than five thousand complete sets of fifty volumes each of the Harvard Classics since 1923." Mr. Alexander gives Dr. Edwin Mims as authority for the statement "that one of the South's leading bankers has read the Harvard Classics entirely through, thus establishing what Dr. Mims seems to regard as an all-time, free-for-all, catch-as-catch-can world's record."

In more serious vein was a discussion of "Library Conditions and Objectives in the South," a year or so ago, at a meeting of the Southern Conference for Education. The speaker was Dr. Louis R. Wilson, librarian at the University of North Carolina — an institution which can fairly be called one of the leading intellectual centers, not alone of the South, but of the United States. Dr. Wilson enumerated some of the peculiarly Southern conditions which I have already tried to summarize. The development of modern public schools and libraries did not begin until after 1880; per capita wealth was and is far below the national average; farm tenancy is widespread and increasing, with depressive economic and social results; the people have been unwilling to tax themselves, so that their average per capita tax is far below the national average; and "the idea still prevails that anybody is competent to organize and direct a library." But much has been and is being accomplished. "Possibly the most notable step taken," Dr. Wilson believes, "has been the establishment of the rural school library." This step has been pushed still further by the adoption of the library standards for high schools by the

Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, to which I have already referred.

Dr. Wilson laid down as the "library objectives" of the South the "full understanding of the value of the library as an institution in its various forms"; the development of the county library; "provisions for the training of an adequate supply of effective library administrators and leaders"; "stimulating funds," such as the state departments of education, agriculture, and public health have at their disposal in their closely allied fields; and "an evangelism in behalf of libraries that measure up to the best national standards." "Education is a lifelong process," he adds, "and as the South wins greater economic independence and leisure, it will be tragic if it does not bring to bear upon its thinking and living all that the library has to offer of fineness and power."

What may be said of libraries may also be said of the reading of serious books from any source. The cultural awakening or reawakening of the South is a process which all of us must watch with intense interest and hopefulness. When it is completed, there will be a better balance in American civilization, a larger variety, perhaps a wholly new influence and emphasis. There is and must always be a world of difference between the culture of the temperate zone and that of the semi-tropical regions within which a considerable portion of the South lies. But for our purposes the South is significant as an enormous laboratory experiment in the popularization of books. The next ten or twenty years should work miracles south of the Mason and Dixon line.

Eliminating the South for the time being, let us now turn to the geographical factors affecting reading which show themselves in the remaining States. We do not need to take our figures too solemnly. They are as important for what they do not show as for what they do.

Let us look at the States which stand high both in library circulations and in magazine reading. The top six are California, Oregon, Washington, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Some rather striking facts emerge. All are on or near the seaboard. They fall into two groups, representing two distinct and homogeneous cultures. In one group the cultural tradition is several centuries old. In the other, unless we think of the Mexican-Spanish civilization as seriously affecting the modes of life of the Anglo-Saxons now inhabiting California, a single century tells the whole story. In one group there is a large industrial nucleus, with a distinctly less prosperous agricultural back country. In the other, agriculture is dominant, with industry relatively in the backgound. One group is economically stable, but hardly progressive. The other is developing rapidly in wealth and population.

All the States included, with the exception of Vermont, rank well above the national average in wealth per capita — California and Oregon conspicuously so. That there is some correlation between wealth per capita and reading habits cannot be doubted. But it is not close or exact. Nevada, with the largest per capita wealth in the Union, stands fifth in magazine circulation per capita, but thirty-third in volumes per capita in the public libraries. We may, if we like, play with the theory that in New England reading habits formed through several generations have been kept alive; and that on the Pacific Coast reading habits have been formed because the Coast is inhabited by a selected, adventurous, and intellectually curious group of people. But this might be spinning the argument rather thin. The reading habits of the western coast have really been formed since the day when it was much of an adventure to go there or make a living there. There is no possible comparison between the Iowa farmer who migrates to the neighborhood of Los Angeles to spend his declining

days and the Argonauts who went West for gold or the ranchers and wheat-growers who followed them.

I think we can safely say that an inherited culture and a degree of prosperity do contribute to reading, whether of books, magazines, or newspapers. A large foreign population, especially if it has not thoroughly mastered English, keeps the reading level down. It is harder to buy books or maintain libraries in a sparsely settled region than in one that is densely occupied. On the other hand, no American is debarred by isolation from subscribing for magazines. This fact probably accounts for Nevada's lavish purchase of magazines and its monumental indifference to books. The distribution of books by mail is also further hampered, as we have seen, by the short-sighted policy of the Post Office Department with respect to them. It may be that the monotony of the central plains of America paralyzes that quick and lively curiosity which is natural to inhabitants of the seaboard. In short, any number of interesting speculations might be built up as to the geographical pattern of our reading.

Gray and Munroe, in their study of "The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults," have made some interesting speculations, to which we shall later return, as to the effect of age, sex, marital condition, occupation, and place of residence upon reading habits. Women apparently read more than men, unmarried persons read more than those who have family cares, and adults in cities read more than adults in the country. These factors, to the extent that they vary geographically, might cause differences in the volume of book distribution. But the whole question of the geography of reading is affected by the fact that it is extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible, to distinguish between cause and effect. Books are read where books are accessible; so are magazines and newspapers. A certain level of culture will lead to a demand for good read-

ing; a general habit of reading good books will raise the level of culture. The process is cumulative, but how it begins is as difficult as to determine whether the hen or the egg came first.

I may sum up this phase of the discussion by saying that historical and geographical accidents certainly have had the largest influence upon the distribution of books, in the United States, whether by booksellers, through the mail, by canvassers, or through public libraries. The nature of the book trade has been to seek the fattest and most convenient markets. Until recently libraries have followed the same law. With the exception of the cultural island of the Pacific Coast, the book market has lain to all intents and purposes within a territory bounded by a line drawn around Chicago, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, and Detroit. Though books have been distributed in fairly large numbers outside this enclosure, it was here that their fate has been determined and the fortunes of authors and publishers made or lost. Are these limitations inevitable? Are they something to which one piously submits as one submits to the fact that the Rocky Mountains are five or six hundred miles west of the lower Missouri River? I cannot help thinking that the book trade has been suffering, at least until recently, from a grave lack of imagination. If automobiles, collars, breakfast foods, toasted or untoasted brands of cigarettes, women's dresses, and a hundred other articles manufactured in a few important centers can be distributed throughout the country, so also can books.

Some one may object that with the commodities just named wide distribution is possible because standardization has been achieved, whereas in books standardization is neither desirable nor, it is hoped, possible. But the methods of manufacture and distribution may be standardized, even though the article made and sold is not. Indeed, a

standardization of bookselling methods that would permanently widen the book market might work against the standardization of the books themselves — since, by multiplying the book-reading public, it would really create new, larger, and more varied publics for literary experiments. At any rate, I think it is safe to predict that the book trade of the United States in the fourth decade of the twentieth century will not much longer be held back by conditions arising in the days of slavery and the covered wagon. Undoubtedly there will always be certain sections of the country in which books will be read more eagerly than in others. One would not want it otherwise, for that would imply a dreadful state of uniformity. But there is nothing in the racial, cultural, religious, geographic, climatic, or economic situation of any part of the United States which makes it forever inevitable that hardly any books shall be read there. Almost any American community will read books, including a certain percentage of good books, if it is exposed to them.

How shall it be exposed to them? In part by public libraries, in part by bookstores, book departments, book counters, rental libraries, book clubs, mail-order houses, chain stores. There is room for all these agencies. The market is so vast that there need be no destructive competition among them. If a community can support a library, paying for it out of taxation, it can also support a bookstore. I cannot believe that there is a county in the United States, in any reasonably well-settled region, too poor, too ignorant, or too unenterprising to do that, provided the proper stimulus is applied. But the present machinery for getting books to readers, and for making readers who will demand books, is still ineffectual. The covered-wagon method still prevails. And this chapter on geography is justified by the undoubted fact that geography is of profound importance to the driver of a covered wagon.

CHAPTER XIV

BOOKS IN AMERICAN LIFE

We have now inspected, with the tourist's interested but confessedly amateurish eyes, the mechanism by which books are manufactured and distributed in the United States. We have seen that, on the whole, Americans are reading far fewer books than might be expected of a nation which is wealthier, in its entirety and per capita, than any other that has ever existed or that now exists, and which has, moreover, an exceptionally high standard of education. We have discovered that the methods by which Americans are supplied with books and are induced to take them home and read them are in some instances obsolete or obsolescent by prevailing business standards, and in others strikingly modern. The book trade is practically standing still at some points and is developing rapidly at others. Distribution of books through specialized bookstores is not, on the whole, keeping up with distribution through other outlets. Distribution by mail or by subscription is at least not increasing rapidly, despite the rise of the book clubs and the resulting alarums and excursions.

On the other hand, there has been rapid growth in the distribution of reprints and cheap editions and in the renting libraries. There are indications that the trade in standard-priced books is expanding, but it is expanding largely because modern methods of distributing the cheaper books are creating a new book-reading public. Whether we are at the beginning of a large expansion of this public, or whether the new methods, like the old ones, will presently reach their limits, will perhaps be decided within the next five years.

We have seen that the schools and the city and county libraries have done their best to train and guide readers, and that they have been affected by the modern spirit of salesmanship and advertising. We have found signs that the level of taste is rising and that good and serious books have a wider sale than they had at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Now, in this concluding chapter, I wish to bring up the further question of the ultimate place of the book in American life. We must for this purpose abandon our quantitative methods of measurement and such preconceptions as we may have as to absolute goodness and badness in books. For a book, realistically viewed, is only one half of an equation, of which the other half is the individual who is reading it. The ultimate problem is to give each individual access to the kind and quantity of reading he needs, which involves also finding out, or helping him to find out, what that kind and quantity is. There can be no doubt that on the average Americans at present read too few books. That is, they would be leading a richer and more enjoyable and useful life if they read more. But if we advocate an increase in the quantity of books read and an improvement in their quality, we must formulate some theory, however generalized, as to the proper place of reading in American life. That is, we must ask how reading would stand in an idealized pattern of American culture.

So far in this discussion I have assumed, in speaking of the publication and distribution of books, that if the number of books distributed and the number of readers who clamor for them were increased, there would be a corresponding cultural gain. I have assumed that a considerable proportion of books were "good" and that "good" books would multiply as books in general multiplied. Is this inference justified? And what is a good book? I presume almost any person who reads at all knows what he, individually,

means by the adjective. The trouble is that no two definitions necessarily coincide. For the majority of readers goodness in books is probably proportional to the facilities they offer for escape from daily life, in which respect they are judged just as are motion pictures and radio programmes. This escape may be made by means of an imagined world utterly different from the real one, or by means of that spiritual release which comes from the recognition that one's personal predicaments are also universal ones, or by the satisfaction of an intelligent and disinterested curiosity. The "Odyssey" doubtless falls under the first head, parts of Shakespeare under the second, and "The Origin of Species" or "The Nature of the Physical World" under the third.

So far, so good. But it may also be said that the cheapest detective story comes under the first classification, the tawdriest of jazz novels under the second, and, let us say, a book of cocktail recipes under the third. In most libraries a rise in the proportion of non-fiction circulated is, as I have pointed out, accepted as evidence that readers' tastes are on the mend. Doubtless the deduction is not altogether unsound. Nevertheless, as I cannot resist repeating on every possible occasion, some fiction is obviously more "serious," that is to say of higher cultural value, than some non-fiction. I shall continue to use the non-fiction yardstick, in default of a better, whenever convenient, but with no illusion that it is an absolute standard of measurement. We cannot — perhaps fortunately — have any such standard. It might be possible to go over, one by one, the thousands of titles issued each year, and over a period of years, ascertain the total sales of each, and determine whether or not taste is improving. But this appalling enterprise, once performed, would represent only the opinion of an individual or of a school of criticism. It might be necessary, for example, to decide whether or not one was

a humanist. Here, at least, we must be satisfied with a less exacting method.

Let us make a few modest comparisons. I think we can discover certain definite indications of what nearly every one would concede to be an improvement in reading tastes during the past three or four decades. We can discover others less definite. The dime novel of the nineties is so nearly extinct as to have become an object of interest of collectors. One, at least, has been reprinted because of a supposed antiquarian importance. The dime novel's place has been taken by the "wood-pulp" magazines, but that is another story. American literary production has been greatly stimulated, since 1891, by the greater protection afforded foreign copyrights in this country. Mark Sullivan, in "Our Times," points out that in 1895 the six best-selling books in the United States were all by English authors; four years later the corresponding six were all by Americans. In 1900 the best-selling books were assumed, as a matter of course, to be fiction; a few years later it became necessary to have a second list of best-selling "general" books, and sometimes a "general" book outsold the best-selling novel.

Let us consider some specific books. At the turn of the century the best-selling novels were: "To Have and to Hold"; "Red Pottage"; "Janice Meredith"; "Richard Carvel"; "Via Crucis"; and "When Knighthood Was in Flower." Five years later, London's "Sea Wolf" and Connor's "Prospector" were on the list — a turn toward a more realistic and perhaps more honest type of romance. Ten years later there were no cloaks and swords among the best-sellers though there were cloaks and suits. In 1919 the diversity of American tastes was indicated by the fact that Joseph Conrad was second on the roll of fiction best-sellers and Zane Grey third. But now the non-fiction best-sellers were on the march — Thayer's "Life of Roose-

velt"; Parker's "American Idyll"; Shaw's "Heartbreak House"; and "The Education of Henry Adams." By 1924 Papini's "Life of Christ" was starting on its quarter-million sale, followed closely by a cook-book, a book of etiquette, a cross-word puzzle book, and "The Americanization of Edward Bok." And 1929 saw such books as Ernest Dimnet's "Art of Thinking," Walter Lippmann's "Preface to Morals," and Benét's "John Brown's Body" coming to the front. In fiction, too, there was a marked contrast with the books of several decades ago, though this is naturally harder to establish. But, whereas pure amusement seemed to be the fiction reader's aim in life in 1899 and 1900, at least half of the fifteen leading books of 1929 were written around ideas of some importance.

I think there can be no doubt that the public which reads fictional best-sellers is more critical, more subtle, and intellectually more active than were its predecessors a generation ago. Year after year the best-selling lists include more "serious" works of fiction, in addition to the large increase in non-fiction. One publisher who has studied this subject carefully stated to me that about fifteen novels each year now do about as well as the best six in 1914, and that in addition fifteen non-fiction books reach sales which would have put them in the best-seller lists at that time. The popularity of the non-fiction book is partly accounted for by the rise of new problems, or the realization of old ones, since the World War. Of course the public cannot always be depended upon to read about problems. Thus, when the Ku-Klux Klan was at the height of its notoriety, a firm which rushed into print with an excellent account of that organization sold approximately fifteen hundred copies. But the public will read for background — that is, it will read books which help it to do its own solving. This may account for the popularity of such books as Dr. Durant's "Story of Philosophy." And of course the public will

read history or biography when those subjects are set to jazz tempo after the modern manner.

Perhaps we should ask, not only what is a good book, but what is a book? According to my desk dictionary a book is "a number of sheets of paper bound or stitched together; especially a printed and bound volume; a literary composition or treatise of some length." There is no particular reason, except the very good one of usage, why a magazine should not be called a book. Magazine editors do, in fact, refer to their publications as "books." And, as I pointed out at the beginning of this discussion, a magazine of high quality may outweigh in cultural importance half the books that are published. When magazines are bound and preserved, they become books; when books are read and discarded, or when they are borrowed or rented and subsequently returned, they are really used as magazines. We cannot even say that a magazine differs from a book in that it is usually a miscellany, whereas a book is most often devoted to a single topic or narrative. Certain magazines now publish "complete novels" — bad ones, usually, to be sure — and collections of essays, poems, or short stories are readily conceded to be books. The best we can say is that in general a book has elements of permanence which a magazine lacks. But above all the book market — I return deliberately to this phrase — is the arena within which the cultural battles of each generation are fought. It is the ultimate clash of ideas, wise and foolish, social and anti-social. The literary art is all-inclusive. The new movements in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, politics, and science go forward with a covering barrage of books.

Yet we shall never understand books, nor shall we even be able to persuade others to read them, unless we cheerfully admit that books are not and cannot be the whole of life — not even the whole of cultural life.

I believe [wrote Anatole France, in his genially cynical preface to "Life and Letters"] it is wiser to plant cabbages than to write books. There are bookish souls for whom the universe is but paper and ink. The man whose body is animated by such a soul spends his life before his desk, without any care for the realities whose graphic presentation he studies so obstinately. Of the beauty of women he knows only what has been written about it. He knows of the labors, sufferings, and hopes of men only what can be sewn on to tapes and bound in morocco. . . . But I know many other people of a different temperament. These search in books for all sorts of fine secrets about men and things. They seek continually and their minds give them no rest. If books bring peace to the peaceful-minded, they trouble these restless souls. I myself know many restless souls. They are wrong to plunge into too much reading. . . . Those who read much are like hasheesh-eaters. They live in a dream. . . . Books are the opium of the West. They devour us. A day will come when we shall all be librarians, and that will end it all. Let us love books in the way that the lover described by the poet loved her pain. Let us love them, for they cost us dear enough. Let us love them, for we are dying because of them.

It will already be sufficiently apparent that there is as yet no grave danger that books will "devour" the American people or that we shall all die of them. Nevertheless, there are certain truths behind the irony. I have quoted Anatole France here and at this length because he raises a very wholesome doubt, and doubt is good for a certain complacency that lies in wait for us at this point. It may be interesting to supplement the testimony of the French satirist with some data gathered by Dr. William S. Gray and Miss Ruth Munroe, to whose excellent study of "The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults" I have already referred. The authors started with two theorems: "First, many of the activities involved in the process of self-education require the wide use of reading; and, second, a sur-

prisingly large number of adults are not interested in reading, are unable to read well, or fail to find desirable types of material." The assumption made earlier in the present study has been that the "surprisingly large number of adults who are not interested in reading" could be greatly reduced in numbers if books were made more accessible — or possibly unescapable. But we have also encountered the puzzling phenomenon, as witnessed in cities well provided with libraries, of large numbers of people to whom opportunities to read are open, but who nevertheless do not read — at least do not read books. In fact, it sometimes seems that the eagerness to read is in direct proportion to the difficulty of obtaining reading material.

Dr. Gray and Miss Munroe found, in studies of reading habits of selected groups of adults, that about fifty per cent read books, seventy-five per cent read magazines, and ninety-five per cent or more read newspapers. When they analyzed the interests and motives behind the reading of nine hundred adults, they found the following emphasized:

> To keep informed concerning current events; to secure specific information of value in making plans; to learn more about events or problems of special interest; to secure the opinion of others touching civic, social, and industrial problems; to keep in touch with business and professional developments; to secure suggestions concerning efficient methods of doing work; to determine important items in correspondence, messages, and instructions; to advance in one's field of work; to broaden one's range of information; to keep the mind stimulated with important things to think about; to develop a broad outlook on life; to secure pleasure during leisure hours; and to satisfy curiosity.

This list would have to be more closely analyzed and reorganized before it could be of direct practical value. It does remind us, however, that not all readers can be caught with the same bait and that not all reading has the same

cultural implications. The reading habit may arise out of unhealthy conditions as well as out of healthy ones. It may be due in an individual to some social or physical maladjustment, and in such cases might diminish in importance if the maladjustment were corrected. It may be no more than a prolonged and unwholesome state of reverie — as it doubtless was in the recent case of a business man who read a detective story a day for some weeks and then shot himself.

It is for this reason that the social activities of certain libraries seem to me highly important — story-telling groups for children, reading and play-acting groups for adults, lectures, and the like. As civilization increases in complexity, our lives are more and more intertwined, one with another, whether we wish it or not. Most of us are under the necessity of being gregarious during a large part of our day. We must rub elbows with our fellows on the lower planes of their lives and ours — on the streets, in trains, cars and subways, in clanging factories, in offices where everything more untimate than keeping a favorable balance between income and outgo has to be forgotten. It would be most unfortunate if we could not counteract the disagreeable effect of some of these contacts by having cultural contacts on a plane farther removed from the struggle for existence. Moreover, the recreations which compete for our attention with the reading of books are usually social in their nature; they at least carry us into crowds or depend upon the agency of other people. This is true of the phonograph, the radio, and the motion picture, as they are generally enjoyed. Solitary and unguided reading has its charms for almost every one at certain times, and for exceptional persons all the time, but it is not characteristic of modern life. It is sometimes pointed out, as though there were something discreditable about it, that many persons read books because certain titles happen to be

the vogue at the moment. This may be unfortunate if the same persons never read anything but what is in the mode — if they read Thornton Wilder but not Terence, Abbé Dimnet but not Socrates. But of itself it merely shows that reading is social. And with our life becoming more and more socialized, reading, too, must be socialized if it is to keep up. It must break down loneliness. It must induce an intelligent and beautiful kind of group-consciousness.

Now, it seems to me to be true that the reading of books has lost ground relatively because it has failed in this very respect. It has not been able to compete successfully with the new group-activities which have sprung up during the past generation. The Lynds call attention to this fact in their unique and indispensable book about "Middletown." They are comparing 1890 with 1925:

> The type of intellectual life that brought anywhere from two dozen to a hundred people, chiefly men, together Sunday after Sunday for an afternoon of discussing every subject from "Books, What to Read and How to Read Them," to "The Origin of Species" and "The Nature of God," has almost disappeared among the males; men are almost never heard discussing books in Middletown today. . . . When teachers come together to-day it is not to read and discuss books as in the old state reading circles; nor do young people meet to read books suggested by the state for Young People's Reading Circles. . . . No longer do a Young Ladies' Reading Circle, a Christian Literary Society (of fifty), a Literary League, a Literary Home Circle, a Literary Fireside Club meet weekly or bi-weekly as in 1890, nor are reading circles formed in various sections of the city, nor does a group of young women meet to study the classics. The young people's societies of the various churches do not form Dickens Clubs or have "literary evenings," as, for example, "an evening with Robert Burns," with the singing and recitation of Burns's poems and the reading of the poet's biography. . . . Young Ladies' clubs in Middletown are more likely now

to play bridge; the attenuated church young people's societies follow mission study or other programmes sent out from denominational headquarters; men do not talk books; chiefly in women's clubs does the earlier tradition persist.

These changes do not mean that Middletown is reading less than it did in the nineties. In 1924 it had fifteen times as many volumes in the public library as it possessed in 1890 and read eight times as many library books per capita. High-school students are now doing far more "supplementary reading" than they did even a few years ago. But the Lynds believe that "any increase in book-reading indicated by heavier library circulation is certainly not among business-class men and only to a limited extent among their wives. It may reflect an increase in the amount of reading done by the working-class, particularly by children of this group, as habits of prolonged schooling and increased use of the library are spreading among them." The kind of competition book-reading has to encounter among the more comfortable classes is indicated by the remark of "a rising young lawyer": "It's next to impossible to get any regular reading or study done. We know an awful lot of people and at least two or three evenings a week go out with them." Bridge, dancing, listening to the radio, going to the motion pictures, motoring, the increased use of the telephone — all these open ways of least resistance in the spending of leisure time.

But whether we are looking at Middletown, which is in a State standing ninth in volumes per capita in public libraries and seventh in library circulation per capita; or at California, which has twice the per capita circulation of the above-mentioned State; or at Arkansas, which has about one twentieth, we find the reading of books most imperfectly socialized. Yet it must compete with other means of recreation which are tempting largely because they

do satisfy the social craving — a craving intensified in America by the appalling loneliness of the pioneer life which is not yet far behind us.

How, other than by providing books in greater abundance, through libraries, renting libraries, and stores, can we assist in this competition? By finding out why and how different individuals and groups read, by carrying farther such investigations as those of Dr. Gray and Miss Munroe, by discovering means by which individuals and groups may be educated, not merely to accept, but to demand, better books than they have been reading, by teaching, as we do not now do, the high art of reading. This is, perhaps, primarily a job for the libraries. But it is also of vital concern to publishers or distributors of books — as nothing which has to do with the kind or amount of book-reading done by the American people can fail to be. The library can only select from among the books it is able to purchase. It cannot meet the readers' needs or the readers' demands unless authors and publishers have first co-operated to that end. Studies of consumers' interests are being constantly made, at great expense, by advertisers and advertising agencies, and sometimes by magazines and newspapers. Authors and publishers must do the same. It becomes more and more obvious that, except in the case of creative literature, the book must be adjusted to its probable readers, and adjusted on a surer basis of knowledge about those readers than now exists. I am not even sure that creative literature need be excepted. Art is a means of communication as well as of self-expression. Nobody writes books in Chinese for an English-reading public. And if the literary artist takes pains to find out what language his intended audience speaks, he might take pains to find out a few other things about them.

Professor Douglas Waples, of the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago, has pointed out the

need of researches in reading tastes and is now laying the foundation for some of them.

The immediate need [as he sees it] is for books about topics of importance to the various groups, books to be written in a style and language that the given groups can understand. Fortunately, the present dearth of such material will not last long, thanks to the discovery by publishers that a gold mine lies at the end of studies which are now being made to eliminate difficulties due to vocabulary and other specific causes. A publisher recently described such a project on which his company has embarked. He plans to publish books on important social problems that will be attractive to eighth-grade pupils of low intelligence levels who are kept in school by compulsory attendance laws. The books are written to pattern. The topics they discuss have been selected on the basis of reliable evidence as being essential to the social education of this particular group. The texts contain no words beyond the normal vocabulary of pupils of the same mental age. . . . Such books should go far, and should at least compete on even terms with Brisbane editorials, tabloids, and films which, as educational media, have the one virtue of simplicity.

But eighth-grade pupils of low intelligence levels are, relatively, a small group. Reading interests are affected, as we have seen, by geographical relations, by racial tradition, by occupation, by sex, by education, by degree of domestication, by religion, and by a dozen other factors. This no one doubts. But precisely how are they affected? Can we study the needs of individuals in such groups and write reading prescriptions for them as a physician prescribes exercise and diet? At first, though, such a possibility makes one shudder. The regimentation of reading would be the final horror of an over-mechanized age. But as a matter of fact the prescription method might be a step away from regimentation. What we have at present, in newspapers, magazines, many books, schools, and to some extent libraries, is a modified lock-step system by which we

try to suit the pace of an "average" child or adult. But the average human being is a fiction. He does not exist. He never has existed. Neither does or has the average farmer, shopgirl, structural steel worker, merchant, or banker. What we mean when we say that we are adapting a specified commodity to the average person, whether that commodity be a book or a toothpaste, is that we are trying to keep within certain wide limits of human tolerance. But the human race is in fact infinitely divisible. To write books consistent with this infinite divisibility would be impossible and probably anti-social. We can, however, adapt ourselves to the undoubted existence of groups whose interests often overlap, but do not coincide.

Professor Waples has selected a list of more than one hundred topics "as representing significant issues in contemporary American society." These he has submitted to selected groups to determine their reading interests. As his methods have not at this writing been put to a thorough test, it is too early to prophesy what they will bring to light. But certain tentative results are significant. I shall quote from one table by way of illustration. In this some sixteen selected topics were submitted to four groups — women elementary-school teachers, men high-school teachers, Vermont farmers, and Chicago factory girls. Let us simplify Dr. Waples's table by picking out six topics. The numbers indicate the interest of each group in each subject on a scale of ten. The smaller the numeral, the greater the interest is assumed to be. The subjects are such as might be expected to have an appeal to any intelligent person who looks beyond the confines of his daily job. But they are also subjects in regard to which the intensity of the individual's interest might be expected to vary somewhat according to sex, occupation, geographical location, etc. To weigh these factors for large numbers of readers would be illuminating.

We have in this case the following result:

	Women Teachers	Men Teachers	Farmers	Factory girls
1. Peace Movement	4	7	1	2
2. Labor	8	5	3	4
3. Self-improvement	1	1	4	3
4. Modern America	2	8	5	3
5. Prohibition	8	8	3	10
6. Marriage and Divorce .	3	5	10	3

The reader may amuse himself by working out the correlations in this abbreviated table, which of course does not do justice to Professor Waples's methods and results. He may note, for example, that on the third and fifth points the men and women teachers are in agreement, and that on the sixth the women teachers and factory girls agree, but that there is a marked difference between the interests of men teachers and farmers. He may observe that of the six topics, self-improvement stands highest, taking the four groups as a whole; and that peace, modern America, labor, marriage and divorce, and prohibition follow in the order named. We cannot, of course, draw general conclusions from this small sample. It is enough to be certain that there are differences in reading interests which can be statistically shown by studies of chosen groups. It is also possible, where library records can be used, to show the difference between reading interests and what is actually read — strange though it may seem, there may be a wide gap here. If a librarian, a bookseller or a publisher knew accurately the true reading interests of his constituency, he could undoubtedly broaden the distribution of his wares. If he does not know them, he may be trying to feed spinach to patrons who are hungry, be sure, but not for spinach.

Every good librarian, as a matter of course, studies his public, though perhaps not often as methodically as Professor Waples. For example, Charles H. Compton, assistant librarian in St. Louis, made among other studies an in-

quiry into "Who Reads William James?" He found among the readers of "Human Immortality" a trunk-maker, a machinist, a stenographer, "a retired farmer, a clerk, three wives, two physicians, and one salesman, and lastly a post-office employee." A printer, a colored probation officer, an artist, and a woman employed in a laundry were among the readers of James's other books.

Let us [suggests Mr. Compton] observe this array of readers as they return their books to the desk at the library. I shall introduce them to you one by one by the nomenclature which they used on their application blanks when they registered to borrow books. First comes a laborer from a large factory of electrical goods, next a maintenance-man at a soap factory, a student at an exclusive school for girls, a lawyer (the only lawyer listed among all those listed as readers of James), a clerk in a wholesale dry-goods company, several teachers and several college students, a colored teacher and a colored high-school student, a colored salesman, a piano teacher, two physicians, and a Bible class of an African Methodist Episcopal church, a clerk in a small grocery, a newspaper reporter, two social workers, and a bond salesman.

I hope some day [Mr. Compton continues] the illusion will be dispelled that public libraries for the most part circulate only fiction and that of the lightest variety. Perhaps the most striking fact in a library survey of readers of books of more serious import would be the comparatively small number from business and the professions. A further indication of the increasing popular demand for serious reading is the recent amazing growth of the movement for adult education which has been sponsored in England and America by workers and shows an encouraging ferment in their mental and intellectual development.

When we come to the subject of adult education, we come to the end of this book and the beginnings of many more. Those who adventure in this field must deal not only with the problem of providing books in proper quantity

and quality for those who need them and want them, but with the far more fundamental problem of the place of reading in our national life. Sooner or later they must confront the difficulty suggested in a recent paper by Dr. Charles H. Judd, director of the School of Education at the University of Chicago.

> There are [Dr. Judd points out] a great many people who are afraid of reading. . . . They dislike reading and avoid it except when driven to it by the most urgent motives. If one examines such people, one often finds that in a formal sense they can read, but they read slowly and with tension. Such poor readers are readily fatigued and they avoid reading. . . . Among high-school pupils and even among college students cases are found where a genuine dread of books results from poor training in reading. The presence of a reluctance to make use of books must be very widespread among the general population.

This phenomenon is often due to poor training in the elementary schools. It may be due to unrecognized eye-strain. It may be brought about by "rhetorical difficulties, such as long sentences or complicated paragraphs," or by a "technical vocabulary which is somewhat strange or, worse still, totally strange." It may be intensified by books which, in paper, type, or some other feature of physical make-up, are below ideal standards of use and legibility. Clearly there is room for research and improvement in the communication of thought by the printed word just as there is in communication by telegraph, telephone, radio, phonograph, or talking motion picture. But it must be admitted that in the quality of inventiveness book manufacturing has lagged behind these other fields. The whole field of reading needs to be re-examined, beginning with psychological studies of speed and ease of reading, and the reasons therefor, and ending with a minute

and careful consideration of all the physical aspects of "book-building."

If all these factors were attacked, the book market might present a limitless horizon. Even such a brief survey of the situation as we have been able to make in this unpretentious volume leads to the conclusion that there are millions of Americans who actually want books — good books — but who either do not know they want them or do not know how to use them. If publishers, librarians, and booksellers can reach these millions, they will be raising the level of American civilization. Whether they do this for money, for glory, or for love does not matter in the least.

THE END

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